

Consumer Insights Tracker: Chapter 5 Other consumer food behaviours

Cutting or skipping meals for health or access reasons

Alongside the measure reported in subsection 4.2 Food insecurity, the Consumer Insights Tracker asks participants if they have cut down the size of meals or skipped meals for any of the following reasons:

- they (or others in their households) were not well enough to shop or cook food (health reasons).
- they had no means to get to the shop to buy food (limited access to shops).

In March 2023, three in ten (30%) said they cut down the size of their meals or skipped meals because they were not well enough to shop or cook food. This is significantly higher than the figure from March 2022 (24%) (Figure 18).

Over one in five (22%) said they cut down the size of their meals or skipped meals because they had no means to get to the shop to buy food. This is significantly higher than the figure from March 2022 (18%). This peaked at 27% in October 2022, but since November 2022 (20%) has remained more stable (Figure 18).

Figure 18: Participants who reported cutting down the size of meals or skipping meals: no means to get to the shop, not well enough to shop or cook food (April 2020 – March 2023)

Data source: COVID-19 Consumer tracker April 2020-October 2021, Consumer Insights Tracker November 2021- March 2023, Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75. Fieldwork dates and sample sizes available in Annex 1, 2 and 3.

Food safety behaviours

Comparing figures from March 2022 to figures from March 2023, there have been no significant changes in the proportion of participants that reported consuming specific food items past its use-by date (Figure 19).

In March 2023:

- more than two in five (46%) reported eating bagged salad past its use-by date (43% in March 2022) – this figure was significantly higher in August 2022 (51%) and February 2023 (49%)
- around two in five (42%) reported eating cooked meat past its use-by date (39% in March 2022) – this figure was highest in August 2022 (46%)
- one in five (22%) reported eating smoked fish past its use-by-date (23% in March 2022)

Figure 19: Participants who have eaten cooked meats, smoked fish and bagged salads that have gone past its use-by- date (March 2022 – March 2023)

Consumer Insights Tracker March 2022- March 2023, Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75. Fieldwork dates and sample sizes available in Annex 2.

In March 2023, 47% of participants reported eating cheese and 40% reported consuming milk past their use-by dates, both in line with figures from March 2022 (44% and 42% respectively) (Figure 20)

Figure 20: Participants who have eaten cheese and milk past its 'use-by' date (March 2022 – March 2023)

Data sources: Consumer Insights Tracker March 2022-March 2023, Online, England, Wales and NI, adults who had eaten the specified food, aged 16-75. Fieldwork dates and sample sizes available in Annex 2.

Christmas and New Year

In November and December 2022, the Consumer Insights Tracker collected insights on a range of consumer behaviours and concerns related specifically to Christmas and New Year. Some of these measures were also asked in November and December 2021.

In both 2021 and 2022, the Consumer Insights Tracker included the question 'in the last week have you or anyone in your household purchased additional food in preparation for Christmas?'. In November 2022, the proportion of participants (22%) who reported purchasing additional food was the same as the previous year – (23% in November 2021). However, this figure increased in December 2021 to 37%, and was significantly higher in the same month the following year (41% in 2022). The fieldwork timings in December 2022 (16 - 19 December 2022) were slightly later than the previous year (10 - 14 December 2021) and therefore closer to Christmas, which may partly explain the difference.

In 2022, the Consumer Insights Tracker also collected data on potential actions (if any) taken by participants to save money at Christmas (from a pre-defined list). In December 2022, more than three quarters (77%) had taken at least one action to save money, significantly higher than the proportion that reported doing so in November 2022 (69%). In December 2022, the most common actions taken were: changing to cheaper brands (36%); shopping in multiple stores to get a better deal (36%); buying less food than usual for Christmas (35%); and buying 'yellow sticker' items (29%) (Figure 21).

Figure 21: Participants who reported taking any action to save money at Christmas (November and December 2022)

Data source: Consumer Insights Tracker November 2022 – December 2022, Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75. Fieldwork dates and sample sizes available in Annex 2.

In the lead-up to Christmas in both 2021 and 2022 (fieldwork dates provided in Annex 1 and 2), participants were asked to ‘think about this Christmas and New Year. How concerned, if at all, are you personally about each of the following when doing your food shopping?’. Data was collected in 2021 and 2022 on four measures:

1. The price of food
2. The availability of food
3. The safety of food
4. The quality of food

Participant concerns were higher across all four of these issues in 2022 compared to 2021. Data for November and December 2022 shows that participants were most concerned about the price of food, compared to the other possible issues, and concerns about food prices were significantly higher compared to the previous year (82% in December 2022 vs. 63% in December 2021). Over half of participants were concerned about the availability of food for Christmas and New Year 2022 (56% in December 2022 vs. 44% in December 2021). Concern about safety and quality of food for Christmas 2022 was lower than for price and availability, but both were significantly higher than in 2021.

An additional two measures were added to the survey in 2022: the ‘healthiness of food’ and ‘sustainability of food’. In November and December 2022 around half of participants reported concern about each of these issues (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Participants who reported being ‘highly’ or ‘somewhat’ concerned about food issues for Christmas and New Year (November – December 2021 and November – December 2022)

Data source: Consumer Insights Tracker November 2021 – December 2021 and November 2022 – December 2022, Online, England, Wales and NI, adults 16-75. Fieldwork dates and sample sizes available in Annex 2 and 3. In 2021 the survey did not include questions about the healthiness of food and the sustainability of food.