

The Food & You Survey Wave 4

Executive Summary Northern Ireland Report

Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

This summary presents the key findings from Wave 4 of the Food and You survey for Northern Ireland, commissioned by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The Food and You survey is the FSA's principal source of methodologically robust and representative evidence on consumers' self-reported food-related activities and attitudes.

Wave 1 of the survey was carried out in 2010, Wave 2 in 2012, Wave 3 in 2014 and Wave 4 in 2016. Wave 4 consisted of 3,118 interviews from a representative sample of adults aged 16 and over across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including 521 interviews in Northern Ireland, on which this report is based.

In addition to this executive summary, a report has been published presenting a descriptive overview of the findings from Wave 4 of Food and You.

Shopping, cooking and eating

The majority of respondents (87%) reported having at least some responsibility for cooking or preparing food in the home, with almost half (48%) saying they were responsible for all or most of this. Women were more likely than men to have all the responsibility (66% compared with 27%). Women were also more likely to cook for themselves or others at least five days a week (86% compared with 58% of men).

The majority of respondents reported eating all breakfast and main evening meals (both 65%) at home in the last seven days. There was greater variability in the proportion of respondents reporting eating lunch at home, with 32% having eaten it at home on all days in the past week and 31% reporting having eaten lunch at home twice or less.

When asked if they ever suffered an adverse reaction when eating certain foods 9% of respondents reported they did. A further 2% said they avoided certain foods because of the adverse reaction they might cause. Of those who reported an adverse reaction or avoided certain foods, the most common foods that people reported having an adverse reaction to were cows' milk and cows' milk products (27%), cereals containing gluten (26%) and crustaceans (15%).

Respondents were asked about consumption of certain types of foods that pose, or are perceived to pose, greater food safety risks, for example in relation to food poisoning.

The majority of respondents reported eating cuts of red meat and processed red meat (burgers, sausages and pre-cooked meats) once or twice a week or less.

Chicken and turkey were eaten more often than red meat with 36% reporting that they ate this type of food 3-4 times a week compared with 21% or less who said they ate red meat or products 3-4 times a week.

Over half (55%) of respondents said they never ate pre-packed sandwiches and 51% said they never ate ready meals.

Generally respondents enjoyed and were interested in food and cooking. The majority of respondents agreed with the statements 'I like trying new things to eat' (61%) and 'I enjoy cooking and preparing food' (63%) while they disagreed with the statement 'I'm not generally interested in food' (81%).

The majority of respondents (82%) reported having at least some responsibility for household food shopping with half (47%) saying they were responsible for all or most of this. As with cooking and preparing food, women were more likely than men to report having all or most of the responsibility for food shopping (68% compared with 24%).

'Food security' means having access at all times to enough food that is both sufficiently varied and culturally appropriate to sustain an active and healthy life. The majority (78%) of respondents reported living in highly food secure households, 12% lived in marginally food secure households and 10% lived in low or very low food secure households (food insecure). Women and men were equally likely to live in food insecure households (10%).

The majority (82%) of respondents reported that their household had never worried in the last 12 months about running out of food before there was money to buy more and 88% said that in the last 12 months they had never experienced food running out and they did not have money to get more. Eighty-eight per cent of respondents said that their household had never experienced not being able to afford to eat balanced meals in the last 12 months.

Overall, 45% of respondents reported making at least one change in their buying or eating arrangements in the last 12 months for financial reasons including 21% who had bought items on special offer more, and 14% who had changed where they shopped for cheaper alternatives, eaten at home more and eaten fewer takeaways.

Food safety in the home

The Index of Recommended Practice (IRP) is a composite measure of food hygiene knowledge and behaviours within the home, which includes questions on five 'domains' of food safety: cleanliness, cooking, chilling, avoiding cross contamination and use by dates. A higher IRP score indicates more reported behaviours that are in line with recommended food safety practice.

There was increase in average IRP score from 66 in Wave 1 to 72 in Wave 4, indicating a small overall improvement in food safety practices. Women had a higher IRP score than men (75 compared with 70).

The extent to which reported food safety practices were in line with FSA recommendations varied depending on the type of practice.

More than eight out of ten respondents reported **cleaning** behaviours in line with recommended practices, saying they always washed their hands before starting to prepare or cook food (85%), and immediately after handling raw meat, poultry or fish (87%).

The majority of respondents reported always **cooking** food until it is steaming hot throughout (84%) in line with recommended practice. The proportions of respondents who reported that they never ate meat or meat products if the meat was pink or had pink/red juices, in line with recommended practice, was 94% for chicken or turkey, 89% for sausages, 87% for pork and 76% for burgers.

The majority said that they would reheat food no more than once (94%), in line with recommended **reheating** practice. Six per cent of respondents reported that they would reheat food twice or more.

When reheating food in a microwave, the FSA recommend always following the product manufacturers' instructions. Microwave power varies and this affects the timing given on instructions. The majority (87%) of respondents with a microwave knew that microwave power varies, although 21% did not know what their microwave wattage was.

When asked what respondents thought the temperature inside the fridge should be, the majority (56%) said it should be between 0 and 5°C (the recommended temperature). This was higher than the proportion in Wave 1 (43%) but lower than the proportion in Wave 3 (62%). Of respondents who had a fridge, half (53%) reported that they or someone else checked the temperature.

The majority (74%) of respondents who reported that their fridge temperature was checked said they did this at least once a month, which is in line with recommended practice for **chilling**. This proportion was similar to previous waves.

Respondents were asked which methods they used to defrost meat or fish. The method reported by the highest proportion of respondents was leaving meat or fish at room temperature (65%), which is not recommended.

Half of respondents (51%) said that they always used different chopping boards for different foods, in line with practices recommended to avoid **cross contamination**. Sixty-seven per cent reported that they stored raw meat and poultry on the bottom shelf of the fridge, in line with recommended practice. The majority (81%) reported that they never stored food in open tins in the fridge, which is in line with recommended practice as the tin may contaminate the food.

In Wave 4, more than half (56%) of respondents said they never washed raw chicken and 60% said that they never washed raw meat (excluding chicken), both of which are in line with recommended practice. The proportions who said they never washed raw chicken and raw meat have both increased since Wave 3 (45% and 50% respectively). Thirty per cent of respondents reported that they never washed raw fish and seafood.

Over half (56%) of respondents reported that they always washed fruit which was going to be eaten raw. Respondents were more likely to report washing vegetables that were going to be eaten raw; 72% said that they always did.

The FSA recommends that the **use by date** is the best indicator of whether food is safe to eat, and this was cited as an indicator by 79% of respondents, similar to previous waves. When asked which date label was the *best* indicator of food safety, 72% selected the use by date (compared with 65% and 69% in Waves 2 and 3).

Seventy-three per cent of respondents reported that they always checked use by dates when buying food. The proportion who reported checking use by dates when cooking or preparing food was lower than that for buying food, with 69% saying they always checked the date. This proportion was similar to previous waves.

Twenty-eight per cent of respondents said they found labels on food products difficult to read because of the size of the print. The proportion reporting difficulty in reading labels is generally associated with age: 40%-51% of people aged 55 and above reported at least some difficulty.

The majority (85%) of respondents reported that they would eat leftover food within two days of cooking it, in line with recommended practice. This was similar to the proportion reporting two days or less in Waves 2 and 3, but lower than the proportion in Wave 1 (92%).

Common sources of information about food safety practices cited by respondents were family and friends (43%) and product packaging (34%). Twenty-three per cent said they used the internet. A third (33%) said they used food TV shows or cooking programmes.

Eating outside the home

The definition of eating out in the Food and You survey encompasses eating or buying food from a wide range of establishments including: restaurants, pubs, bars, nightclubs, cafés and coffee shops, sandwich bars, fast food outlets, canteens, hotels, stalls as well as takeaway food. Almost all respondents (95%) ever ate out, with half (52%) doing so at least once or twice a week.

Respondents most commonly used their own experience of establishments (62%) when deciding where to eat out. Around half also took recommendations from friends or family (50%) and word of mouth (47%) into account.

When shown a list of factors which might influence their decision on where to eat out, 70% of respondents reported that the cleanliness and hygiene of the establishment was important to them; overall a quarter (25%) of respondents who ate out considered this the most important factor. A good hygiene rating or score was also mentioned by half (48%) of respondents.

Men and women were both just as likely to be influenced by the cleanliness and hygiene of the establishment when deciding where to eat out (70% of women, 69% of men). Overall 29% of women and 20% of men said this was the most important factor in their decision making.

The majority of respondents (89%) reported having seen the sticker belonging to the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS), similar to Wave 3 (86%) and an increase from Wave 2 (66%).

Recognition of the FHRS was associated with age: at least 92% of those aged 16 to 54 recognised the images compared with 49% of those aged 75 and over.

Food poisoning

Overall, 29% of respondents reported having ever had food poisoning, similar to previous waves. Thirty per cent of men and 27% of women reported having had food poisoning. Forty-eight per cent of respondents in Wave 4 and 33% in Wave 3 reported having taken no action after experiencing food poisoning. Where action was taken, the most commonly mentioned were to stop eating at certain food establishments (37%) and to stop eating certain foods (10%).

Overall 80% of respondents agreed with the statement that they were unlikely 'to get food poisoning from food prepared in my own home'. Respondents were more likely than in previous waves to agree with the statement 'I always avoid throwing food away' (73% compared with 64% in Wave 3, 58% in Wave 2 and 52% in Wave 1).

Food production and the food system

One third (36%) of respondents always felt confident that food is what it says it is on the label or the menu. Respondents who did not always feel confident were asked whether they had, in the last year, taken any subsequent action. Almost a quarter (24%) of respondents reported reading food labels more carefully, 11% had stopped eating certain foods, 9% had stopped shopping for food at certain places, and 5% had tried to get more information about the issue.

When asked to what extent they felt informed about chemicals deliberately added to food by producers, 41% of respondents felt very well or well informed. Respondents felt generally less well informed about chemical residues from the food production process (e.g. pesticides, veterinary medicines); 84% felt not informed about this matter compared with 59% who felt not informed about chemicals deliberately added to food by producers. Eighty-two per cent of respondents felt not informed about the chemicals that can occur naturally in food (e.g. naturally occurring toxins or heavy metals such as lead) and 80% about the chemicals that can be formed during the cooking process (e.g. through cooking at high temperatures or through smoking of food). Around one fifth (18%-20%) felt informed about either of these two matters.

Almost two thirds (61%) of respondents agreed that they would like more information about what they can personally do to limit the presence of chemicals in food. Sixty per cent of respondents were concerned about possible long-term health effects of chemicals in food.

Almost half (46%) of respondents agreed with the statement that 'to help ensure there is enough to feed the population worldwide, we in the UK will have to make changes to what we eat'. Similarly, 47% of respondents agreed that 'to produce more food, we in the UK will have to make more use of technology in food production'.

Responses were a little more evenly spread to the statement 'to help ensure there is enough food to feed the population worldwide, we in the UK will have to eat less meat': 27% agreed and 41% disagreed.

Whilst 32% of respondents agreed that when buying food they check to see where it was produced, a higher proportion (50%) did not check. More than half of all respondents agreed that where possible they prefer to buy food produced in the UK and Ireland (62%), that they had greater trust in the quality of food produced in the UK and Ireland compared with food imported from overseas (69%), and that they would be prepared to pay more for food and drink that is produced in the UK and Ireland (56%). Overall 92% per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that it is important to support farmers and food producers in the UK and Ireland.

There was some concern that food produced in the UK and Ireland tends to be more expensive than food imported from overseas: 44% of respondents agreed with this statement.

Healthy eating

The majority of respondents (80%) thought that the food they usually ate was healthy, similar to previous waves. Almost all respondents agreed that what you eat makes a big difference to how healthy you are (92%) and that small dietary changes, such as eating less fat or cutting down on sugar, can lead to benefits for future health (94%).

Eighty-five per cent of respondents agreed that experts contradict each other over what foods are good for you and 40% agreed that they get confused over what is supposed to be healthy and what is not. Around two-thirds (67%) of respondents agreed that the tastiest foods are the ones that are bad for you.

Almost half (47%) of respondents agreed that the main reason for people to eat a more healthy diet is to lost weight, while 19% agreed that if you take enough exercise you can eat whatever you want, and 14% agreed that if you are not overweight you can eat what you like.

Overall 76% of respondents disagreed with the statement 'good health is just a matter of good luck'.

Around three-fifths of respondents (62%) said that the food they ate outside of the home was less healthy than the food they ate when at home. Respondents were most likely to mention restaurants (58%), fast food restaurants (52%), and takeaway outlets (47%) as places where they would like to see more information about healthy eating options.

Overall, 87% of respondents stated that the recommended number of portions of fruit and vegetables to consume per day was five, in line with recommendations. This was similar to Wave 1 (87%) and Wave 2 (91%), but higher than Wave 3 (76%). The majority of respondents reported, in line with the recommendations, that frozen vegetables (90%), dried fruit (80%), fruit smoothies (78%), pure fruit juice (76%), tinned fruit or vegetables (74%), pulses (73%), and baked beans (67%) could count towards '5 a day'.

When asked about the recommended number of calories average men and women should eat in a day, 38% mentioned 2,500 calories for men, and 41% mentioned 2,000 calories for women, both in line with recommendations. The FSA recommends that the average daily intake of total fat should not exceed 95g for a man and 70g for a woman. Half (50%) of both men and women reported that they should eat between 1-20 grams of fat each day. Four per cent of men provided an answer above the recommended amount, as did 22% of women. Six per cent of respondents stated that the recommended daily intake of salt was 6g, in line with FSA recommendations.

The Eatwell Guide illustrates the types and proportions of foods which are recommended to come from each food group for a balanced diet. Respondents were shown a picture of a blank Eatwell Guide with its sections marked but not labelled, and were asked to place cards showing each of the food groups in the recommended sections on the plate to represent what they thought was the recommended balanced diet. Thirteen per cent of respondents placed all six food groups in the recommended sections of the Eatwell Guide. Thirty-eight per cent placed four of the six food groups in the recommended sections, 17% placed three of six, 21% two of six, and 9% one of six. Three per cent did not place any food groups in the recommended sections. Respondents were most likely to place fruit and vegetables (86%) and foods high in fat, salt and sugars (69%) in the recommended section of the Eatwell Guide. Beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat and other proteins were least likely to be placed correctly on the Eatwell Guide (23%).

Respondents were asked how important they thought a variety of factors were for a healthy lifestyle in adults. Almost all respondents saw the following as important for a healthy lifestyle: eating fruit and vegetables (99%), keeping to a healthy weight (98%), eating less salt (97%), drinking plenty of water (97%), limiting food and drinks high in sugar (96%), limiting foods high in saturated fat (93%), eating breakfast every day (91%), and limiting foods high in total fat (90%). Respondents were least likely to consider eating pulses such as soya beans, lentils or chickpeas as important for a healthy lifestyle (60%).

The types of food that respondents reported eating most often (at least once a week) were bread, rice, pasta, potatoes and other starchy foods (99%), and fruit and vegetables (98%). Around eight in ten respondents reported eating sweets and chocolate (74%) and biscuits, pastries and cakes (77%) at least once a week. Half of respondents (51%) reported eating five or more portions of fruit and vegetables on the day before they were interviewed.

