

The 2014

F O O D and Y O U

Survey

Northern Ireland Bulletin
Executive Summary

Food and You 2014: Northern Ireland Bulletin

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Executive summary

This summary presents the key findings for Northern Ireland from Wave 3 of the Food and You survey, commissioned by the Food Standards Agency (FSA or the Agency). The Food and You survey is used to collect information about reported behaviours, attitudes and knowledge relating to food safety issues. It provides data on people's reports of their food purchasing, storage, preparation, consumption and factors that may affect these, such as eating habits, influences on where respondents choose to eat out, experiences of food poisoning, knowledge of healthy eating recommendations and attitudes towards healthy eating.

Wave 1 of the survey was carried out in 2010, Wave 2 in 2012 and Wave 3 in 2014.

Wave 3 consisted of 3,453 interviews with a representative sample of adults aged 16 and over across the UK, including 524 interviews in Northern Ireland on which this report is based.

In addition to this executive summary, descriptive overviews of the key findings for Northern Ireland from Wave 3 have been published in six separate bulletins, one for each of the following main topics:

- Eating, cooking and shopping
- Food safety in the home
- Eating outside the home
- Experience of food poisoning and attitudes towards food safety and food production
- Advice on healthy eating
- Eating and health

Eating, cooking and shopping

Seven in ten respondents (70%) reported that they cooked or prepared food for themselves every day. Women were more likely to report preparing food for themselves (80%) and others (56%) on a daily basis compared with men (58% and 30% respectively). Those aged 16-34 were less likely than older respondents to report cooking for themselves every day (53% compared with 77% of those aged 35 and over). Those aged 16-24 (18%), 25-34 (35%) and 75 and over (28%) were less likely than respondents aged 35-74 (55%) to report cooking for others on a daily basis.

Two per cent of respondents reported that they were allergic to certain food. In total six per cent of respondents reported living in a household in which someone has a food allergy (not necessarily clinically diagnosed).

Respondents were most likely to report having learnt to cook from a family member (77%) with 62% saying this was the main way they had learnt. Around two-fifths of respondents (22%) reported that their cooking was mainly self-taught. There was greater variety in the main ways respondents reported having learned about food

safety: 41% reported learning about food safety from a family member, 23% reported being self-taught, 18% learnt at school and 11% on a course.

While respondents were most likely to report currently getting information about food safety from family and friends (35%), food TV shows (29%) and product packaging (28%), they were most likely to say that, in the future, they would use internet search engines to find information on food safety (reported by 38% of respondents).

The proportion of respondents who reported using internet search engines to get information about food safety at present (23%) was higher than at Wave 2 (15%). The proportion of respondents saying they would use certain other sources in the future was lower than at Wave 2, specifically food websites (17% compared with 26% at Wave 2) and news websites (two per cent compared with seven per cent at Wave 2).

Around six in ten respondents (61%) said their household did a 'main' food shop on a weekly basis and 84% said large supermarkets were used for their household's main shopping trip. Just over a quarter (26%) of respondents relied solely on large supermarkets for their household's food shopping.

Women were more likely than men to say they were responsible for all or most of their household's food and grocery shopping (67% compared with 27%).

Respondents were most likely to report usually buying raw meat that was fresh (96%) rather than frozen (24%), not specifically free range or organic (85%) and loose or freshly cut (80%). This was most likely to be from an independent butcher (60%) although 46% reported buying meat from a large supermarket.

Overall, 54% of respondents at Wave 3 said that they had made at least one change in their buying or eating arrangements in the last six months for financial reasons; this is lower than the proportion at Wave 2 (62%).

Thirty-one per cent of respondents reported buying items on special offer more in the previous six months for financial reasons, a greater proportion than at Wave 1 (17%). The level of other reported changes for financial reasons was similar across the three waves of the survey.

Food safety in the home

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

Around three-quarters of respondents (77%) reported **cleaning** behaviours in line with recommended practices, saying they always washed their hands before starting to prepare or cook food and after handling raw meat, poultry or fish.

Around half (49%) of those who reported storing raw meat and poultry in the fridge reported practices in line with those recommended to avoid **cross contamination**. This meant that they reported storing raw meat and poultry separately from ready-to-eat foods and in sealed containers or at the bottom of the fridge. Around four-fifths of respondents (81%) reported keeping certain foods in certain parts of the fridge, and, of these, 85% said this was for reasons of food safety, hygiene, or to stop cross contamination.

Other behaviours that may reduce the risk of cross contamination were also explored. Just under half of respondents (46%) said they always used different chopping boards for different types of food. Fifty per cent of respondents reported that they never washed raw meat or poultry, excluding chicken, and a similar proportion said that they never washed raw chicken specifically (45%).

Sixty-two per cent of respondents who had a fridge said the fridge temperature should be between 0°C and 5°C (the recommended temperature). In total, 10% of respondents who had a fridge reported behaviour in line with recommended practice for **chilling** (i.e. checking that their fridge temperature is between 0°C and 5°C, at least monthly, using a thermometer). More than half of respondents who had a fridge (53%) reported never checking their fridge temperature.

The majority of respondents reported always **cooking** food until it is steaming hot throughout (78%) in line with recommended practice. Ninety-three per cent of respondents reported that they never ate chicken or turkey if the meat was pink or had pink or red juices. The majority said they would reheat food no more than once (94%), in line with recommended **reheating** practice.

Eighty-four per cent of respondents reported that they would eat leftover food within two days of cooking it, in line with recommended practice.

As at Waves 1 and 2, women were generally more likely than men to report food safety practices in line with recommended practice. For example, women were more likely to report always washing hands before preparing food (88%) and after handling raw meat (88%) compared with men (75% and 77% respectively). Women were also more likely to report storing raw meat and poultry on the bottom shelf of the fridge (78% compared with 59% of men) and always checking use by dates before cooking or preparing food (78% compared with 63%).

The oldest respondents (aged 75 and over) were less likely to report some practices in line with recommended practice compared with the other age groups (e.g. hand washing, food storage, and use of use by dates). Similar findings were observed at previous waves of the survey.

Eating outside the home

Similar to Waves 1 and 2, 78% of respondents reported eating out or buying food to take away in the last week. Eight per cent reported eating out six times or more in the last week.

When asked what was important to them when deciding where to eat out, 60% of respondents said that the cleanliness and hygiene of eating establishments was important. Around four in ten said a good hygiene rating was important (39%), compared with 24% at Wave 1. Recommendations and reviews (47%), price (47%), and good service (44%) were also selected as important factors when deciding where to eat out. Men were more likely than women to say that price was important to them when deciding where to eat (20% compared with 11% of women).

Forty-four per cent of respondents who ate out said that food was less safe when eating out compared with eating at home.

While 88% of respondents said they were aware of standards of hygiene when eating out, eight per cent said they were not. The proportion reporting that they were very or fairly aware of hygiene standards when eating out was lowest among those aged 25-34 (79%), and highest among those aged 75 and over (95%).

Respondents were most likely to report judging the hygiene standards of food establishments from the appearance of the establishment (58%), by a food hygiene sticker (39%), or by the appearance of staff (36%). The proportion mentioning using a food hygiene sticker was greater than at Wave 1 (nine per cent). More than half (56%) said they used a hygiene certificate or sticker to judge hygiene standards, similar to the proportion at Wave 2 (48%) and higher than that at Wave 1 (22%).

Eighty-eight per cent of respondents reported having seen any of the stickers and certificates belonging to different food hygiene rating schemes, compared with 78% at Wave 2. Recognition of the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (FHRS) in Northern Ireland and England was higher than at Wave 2, with 83% of respondents in Northern Ireland recognising the scheme at Wave 3 compared with 66% at Wave 2. The majority of those who recognised a certificate or sticker from each scheme said they had seen it in the window or door of a food establishment (e.g. 98% for the FHRS).

Overall, 28% of respondents reported having used a hygiene rating scheme in the past 12 months to check an establishment's rating before deciding to eat there. Amongst these respondents using a scheme, 91% said they had used the information in the establishment's door or window. Nineteen per cent reported that they had checked the rating on the internet. Of those who had used a scheme, almost all (99%) said they found it helpful.

Food poisoning and attitudes towards food safety and production

A quarter (25%) of respondents reported experiencing food poisoning in the past. Four per cent said they had experienced food poisoning in the last year, and two per cent reported that they had experienced it more than once during this time. As a consequence of having had food poisoning, 33% reported that they had stopped eating at certain food establishments.

Around three-quarters of respondents (77%) agreed with the statement 'I am unlikely to get food poisoning from food prepared in my own home'. Around a fifth (19%) agreed that 'it is just bad luck if you get food poisoning', which was lower than at Wave 1 (31%). Just over a half of respondents (53%) agreed that 'if you eat out a lot you are more likely to get food poisoning'.

Eighty-two per cent agreed with the statement 'restaurants should pay more attention to food safety and hygiene'. The proportion of respondents saying they always avoid throwing food away was higher at Wave 3 (64%) compared with Wave 1 (52%).

As at Wave 2, respondents were more likely to report concern about food imported from outside the UK (64%) than about food produced in the UK (40%). Levels of concern about both were higher at Wave 3 than at Wave 2 (when 54% and 30% of respondents reported concern about these issues respectively). Greater concern was reported about meat than about fruit and vegetables: 74% of respondents said

they were concerned about imported meat (compared with 59% at Wave 2) and 40% that they were concerned about meat produced in the UK (compared with 28% at Wave 2), while 36% said they were concerned about imported fruit and vegetables and 25% about UK produced fruit and vegetables.

Advice on healthy eating

Respondents were shown a picture of a blank plate with the eatwell plate 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. Twenty-eight per cent of respondents placed all five food groups in the recommended sections of the eatwell plate, similar to the proportions at Waves 1 and 2 (25% and 27%). Fifty-six per cent placed three of the five food groups in the recommended sections, five per cent placed two food groups in the recommended sections, five per cent placed one food group in the recommended section and three per cent placed none of the food groups in the recommended sections. The foods least frequently placed in their recommended sections were starchy foods (44%) and protein (42%).

A number of measures were included in the survey related to the Government's '8 tips for eating well' advice. Eating fruit and vegetables (82%), drinking plenty of water (79%), eating breakfast every day (78%) and limiting food and drinks high in sugar (77%) were the factors most commonly rated as being very important for a healthy lifestyle. Around seven in ten respondents said that it was important to limit foods high in fat (72%) and saturated fat (71%). Around seven in ten respondents said keeping to a healthy weight (69%) or eating less salt (69%) was very important. Fifty-one per cent thought that it was very important to eat fish and 33% per cent said this about starchy foods.

In terms of awareness of recommended daily allowances (RDAs), a quarter (25%) stated the recommended maximum daily intake of calories for women was 2000 calories a day, and 21% said this was 2500 calories a day for men, in line with FSA guidance. Younger respondents (aged 25-34) were more likely to give an answer in line with the FSA recommendations (35%) than those aged 60 or over (13%).

Overall, three quarters of respondents (75%) stated that the recommended daily number of portions of fruit and vegetables was five, similar to the proportion at Wave 1 (81%) but below that at Wave 2 (90%). At least two-thirds of respondents identified that frozen vegetables (91% compared with 81% at Wave 1), tinned fruit or vegetables (83%), pure fruit juice (80%), dried fruit (76%), fruit smoothies (73%), baked beans (67%) and pulses (67%) count towards the recommended minimum of five portions of fruit and vegetables per day, in line with FSA guidance.

Seven per cent of respondents stated that the recommended daily intake of salt was 6g, in line with FSA recommendations. Similarly, a small proportion of respondents said that the maximum daily intake of total fat is 95g for men (one per cent of male respondents) and 70g for women (six per cent of female respondents), in line with guidance. After being told the recommended maximum daily intake of total fat, nine per cent of male respondents and 10% of female respondents said the maximum daily intake for saturated fat was 30g or 20g respectively, in line with Agency recommendations.

Eating and health

Almost all respondents agreed that what you eat makes a big difference to how healthy you are (95%) and that small dietary changes can lead to benefits for future health (95%). The majority of respondents (80%) thought that the food they usually ate was very or fairly healthy, which was similar to the results at Waves 1 and 2. Forty-four per cent agreed with the statement 'I do not need to make any changes to the food I eat, as it is already healthy enough'.

Four-fifths of respondents (80%) agreed that the experts contradict each other over what foods are good for you and around two-fifths (42%) agreed that they get confused over what is supposed to be healthy and what is not.

The types of food that respondents reported eating most often (at least once a week) were fruit and vegetables (99%), starchy foods (99%) and milk and dairy foods (98%). Nine in ten respondents (90%) reported eating raw fruit at least once a week. A similar proportion (88%) reported eating raw vegetables, including salad, at least once a week. Just under half of respondents (48%) reported eating five or more portions of fruit and vegetables on the day before they were interviewed.

Respondents were also asked whether they had made any changes to the food they ate over the past six months; 47% reported that they had not. Twenty-six per cent of respondents said that they were eating more fruit and vegetables and around a quarter said that they were eating smaller portions (24%).

Around half of respondents (48%) who reported that they had made changes to their diet in the past six months said that they had done so to be more healthy and 44% mentioned making changes to lose or maintain their weight. The most common difficulty mentioned by respondents in eating more healthily was the cost of food (32%). The proportion of respondents mentioning this was greater than at Wave 1 (11%) and Wave 2 (22%). Eighteen per cent said that they would not have any difficulties in trying to eat more healthily (compared with 25% at Wave 2).

Around three-fifths of respondents (63%) said that the food they ate outside of the home was less healthy than the food they ate when at home and 85% named at least one type of food establishment where they would like to see more information about healthy options. Fifteen per cent said that they would not like to see more information about healthy food options in any of the places listed. Respondents were most likely to mention restaurants (64% compared with 50% at Wave 1), takeaway outlets (63% compared with 44% at Wave 1) or fast food outlets (58% compared with 38% at Wave 1) as places they would like to see more information about healthy eating options.