

Contact: Katie Calligaro  
412-456-3596  
[katie.calligaro@ketchum.com](mailto:katie.calligaro@ketchum.com)



## FACT SHEET

### **“THE STATE OF THE AMERICAN DIET: HOW CAN WE COPE?”**

#### **Rutgers University Study Published in *Topics in Clinical Nutrition***

*The purpose of the research is to identify factors that influence food consumption and enlighten consumers on the poor state of the American diet.*

*Recommendations were made for helping Americans choose nutritious convenient foods.*

#### **Key Finding #1: Confirmation that the American diet is unbalanced and is currently:**

- On target for protein, fat and carbohydrates (as a percent of total calories), cholesterol, vitamin C, folate and iron (men)
- Low in fiber, vitamin A, vitamin E, iron (women), calcium and phytonutrients
- High in calories, added sugar and sodium

**Canned Food Fact:** Many canned fruits and vegetables are high in vitamin A, and are comparable in vitamin A to their cooked fresh or frozen counterparts. In fact, canned pumpkin, for example, is an excellent source of vitamin A. One-half cup of canned pumpkin contains three times more vitamin A than fresh pumpkin. One-cup of canned pumpkin has 380% DV.

#### **Key Finding #2: The top five reasons Americans choose what to eat are:**

- Food appeal (taste, appearance and preferences)
- Health considerations (nutrient and calorie content)
- Weight, physical appearance and attractiveness concerns
- Food price
- Ease of preparation

**Canned Food Fact:** Several university studies confirmed that canned fruits and vegetables are comparable in nutrition to their cooked fresh and frozen counterparts, making canned products a convenient, economical way for Americans to eat healthfully.

#### **Key Finding #3: Americans are eating more prepared foods at home, evidenced by:**

- An increase in consumption of commercially prepared foods, such as takeout, supermarket prepared and prepare-at-home ‘meal kits’
- A decrease in consumption of food at retail eating establishments

**Canned Food Fact:** Canned foods are easy and accessible for everyone, everywhere, every day and play a crucial role in contributing to the nation’s nutrition.

#### **Key Finding #4: Americans are eating more frequently at the last minute, shown by:**

- An increased number of daily meals and snacks
- One-third decide what to make for dinner at the last minute
- Dinner selections made because they required little or no planning

**Canned Food Fact:** Since canned food is already cooked, stocking your pantry with nutritious canned fruits, vegetables, beans, meats, fish, soups and sauces is an easy way to keep meal preparation and cooking time to a minimum.

**Experts made the following recommendations for dealing with mealtime decisions:**

- **Make eating healthfully a priority.** The benefits of eating healthy and preparing healthy meals far outweigh the effort of choosing and preparing them.
- **Know the value of a healthy diet.** Food isn't just about flavor, the nutrients in whole foods, including fruits, vegetables and whole grains provide sustainable energy and reduce heart disease risk.
- **Engage in mindful eating.** Eat without distractions and reduce mindless intake of excess calories.
- **Savor the flavors of food.** Give "healthy" foods a try and see that they do taste good and can be enjoyed. Discovering your own palate and learning what you like can increase the variety of foods consumed.
- **Retrain your palate.** Modify taste preferences over time; gradually use less added sugar, sodium and fatty foods.
- **Let food do its intended job.** Recreate relationships with food and respect food more for what it can do for your physical health.
- **Focus on portion size.** Focus on quantity and size of meals and snacks and learn appropriate portion sizes to bring calorie and nutrient intake under control.
- **Drop out of the clean plate club.** Split your meal in half and save half for later.
- **Read and heed Nutrition Facts labels.** Read food labels to gradually build a knowledge base about foods and make more informed food choices.
- **Engage in self-discovery.** Learn what you eat and how your diet compares to dietary guidelines, then make favorable changes.
- **Change slowly and permanently.** Change only one aspect of your diet at a time – pick one factor to focus on, once accomplished, change other things.
- **Raise nutrient density and lower energy density.** Fill up on nutrients and water, not calories – choose fruit over its calorie dense partner, fruit juice.
- **Make it easy to eat healthfully.** Make healthier food options easy, appealing and available – leave a fruit bowl on the counter, stock the pantry with canned or dried fruit and put cut up veggies in the fridge.
- **Plan ahead.** Plan a week ahead or when driving to work in the morning, just have a plan.
- **Expand nutrition education to include food education.** Expand nutrition education beyond just nutrients – include how to choose and prepare foods.
- **Schedule family meals and make them a priority.** Make family meals a priority – the benefits (nutritionally & behaviorally) of eating meals as a family are invaluable.
- **Use information from the media wisely.** Gather information before making changes – beware if a news story sounds too good to be true or contradicts generally accepted health knowledge.

**ABOUT THE STUDY**

- Conducted by authors from Rutgers University Department of Nutritional Sciences
- Published in *Topics in Clinical Nutrition*, volume and issue 22:3
- Funded by the Canned Food Alliance
- For full research results and solutions for achieving a healthy diet while still maintaining lifestyle preferences, visit [www.mealtime.org](http://www.mealtime.org).

**Daily Average Nutrient Intake for Americans  
Older than 2 Years of Age Compared to the  
Nutrient Reference Values<sup>a</sup>**

<b>Nutrition Facts</b>	
Serving Size: Average Daily Intake <sup>b</sup>	
Servings: 1	
Amount Per Serving	
<b>Calories</b> <sup>1</sup> 2,146	Calories from Fat 711
	% Nutrient Reference Value <sup>a</sup>
<b>Total Fat</b> <sup>1</sup> 79g	122%
Saturated Fat <sup>1</sup> 26g	130%
Monounsaturated Fat <sup>1</sup> 30g	125%
Polyunsaturated Fat <sup>1</sup> 16g	80%
Trans Fat <sup>5</sup> 5.3g	n/a
<b>Cholesterol</b> <sup>1</sup> 265mg	88%
<b>Sodium</b> <sup>2</sup> 3334mg	139%
<b>Total Carbohydrate</b> <sup>2</sup> 276g	92%
Dietary Fiber <sup>3</sup> 15g	60%
Added Sugar <sup>4</sup> 82g	256%
<b>Protein</b> <sup>1</sup> 78g	156%
Vitamin A <sup>2</sup> 77%	•
Calcium <sup>2</sup> 88%	•
Folate <sup>2</sup> 115%	•
Vitamin C <sup>2</sup> 157%	
Iron <sup>2</sup> 85%	
Vitamin E <sup>2</sup> 40%	

<sup>a</sup> Nutrient Reference Values are Daily Values (DV) based on a 2,000 calorie diet for all nutrients except added sugar, monounsaturated fat, and polyunsaturated fat for which the Dietary Guidelines for Americans for a 2,000 Calorie diet were used<sup>20, 23</sup>. (See Table 1.)

<sup>b</sup> Average daily nutrient intake is based upon nationally representative dietary surveys; N varies for nutrient intake as indicated below.

<sup>1</sup>N=8,604; NHANES 1999-2000<sup>19</sup>

<sup>2</sup>N=17,544; NHANES, 1999-2000, NHANES 2001-2002 for these nutrients values are available for >1 year old<sup>18, 19</sup>

<sup>3</sup>N=8,940 NHANES 2001-2002 for these nutrients values are available for >1 year old<sup>18</sup>

<sup>4</sup>N=15,010 CSFII 1994-1996<sup>3</sup>

<sup>5</sup>N=11,258 CSFII 1989-1991<sup>27</sup>

Lippincott, Williams and Wilkins. *Topics In Clinical Nutrition*, volume and issue 22:3

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