

# FACTFILE: GCE NUTRITION & FOOD SCIENCE

## EATING PATTERNS – TRENDS IN FOOD CONSUMPTION



### Eating patterns – trends in food consumption

#### Learning outcome

- Explore the trends in food consumption that have led to increased prevalence of diet-related disorders.



#### Trends in food consumption

The four main trends in food consumption that have increased the prevalence of the disorders of obesity and diabetes are:

- demographics;
- social change;
- employment; and
- leisure patterns.



#### Demographics

There are more single households including single adult, students and older people. This has resulted in larger numbers of single portions of ready meals and convenience foods and 'meals for one'. These processed foods are usually high in fat, sugar or salt.

Population studies reveal more people eat outside the home and there is more snacking of high fat, salt and sugar (HFSS) foods. There are more fast food outlets and deli counter foods sold in retail shops and garages often available 24/7 which makes snack foods readily available and this has contributed to obesity levels.

#### Social change

Fewer people eat three meals a day and regularly consume snacks in between meals. Children and younger adolescents are likely to eat 3-5 meals a day plus snacks. Breakfast consumption is low among all groups and this can result in increased snacking and grazing. The rise of coffee shops has resulted in people meeting to eat and drink socially which can increase the number of HFSS snacks consumed. It is estimated that 30% of meals are eaten away from home.

More money is spent on processed foods. There have been significant upward trends in household expenditure on total fats and oils, butter, sugar

and preserves, fruit and fruit juice, soft drinks and beverages. Also more money is spent on alcoholic drinks to be consumed at home.

Watching cookery programmes on television can be an influential factor on eating habits and there has been an increase in the numbers of people baking at home as a result of the impact of these programmes. Whilst cookery programmes may encourage cooking and baking they do not always promote healthy eating.

## Employment

Full-time employed parents tend to prepare fewer family meals and research indicates that adults and children in dual career families often eat a less healthy diet compared to parents who have more time to spend at home. Families with both parents working tend to eat less fruit and vegetables. (Dr. Bauer: The Journal Social Science & Medicine. August 2012)

There has been an increase in the number of females in employment which has had a direct correlation to the amount of convenience foods purchased because many families follow traditional roles and the main meals are prepared by the female. Fewer meals are prepared from scratch and ready-made sauces, prepared vegetables and ingredients are the norm in food preparation in many homes. Such ingredients may have less nutrients than fresher varieties. Shift patterns in employment have resulted in less family meals eaten together. More meals may be reheated in microwave ovens and eaten alone and there are less rigid or clearly defined meal times. More HFSS snacks are consumed which can be ready to eat or reheat.

Work-related stress among both parents can lead to a higher consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks and fast food by both children and parents. Working parents may find it harder to put healthy food on the table than those who are in part-time employment or stay at home. [Source: Stress at Work Often Leads to Poor Eating Habits at Home](#)

## Leisure patterns

Many parents work five days a week from Monday to Friday and Saturdays and Sundays are main leisure days. 45% of families indicate that their most common leisure activity is watching television and 22% spend leisure time being active or doing sporting activities. More leisure time can be linked to boredom and overeating of HFSS snacks.

The most common leisure activity in the UK is watching television. The average viewing time is 25 hours per person per week. Almost all households have at least one television set, most families have satellite television with many channels and many television programmes can be viewed online. The car, TV, computers, desk jobs, high-calorie food, and clever food marketing strategies have all encouraged inactivity and poor food choice and contributed to the rise in diabetes and obesity.

Leisure time is increasingly spent indoors whereas the incentives for outdoor play have fallen due to safety concerns and a lack of access to green spaces and sports facilities. Longer working hours and more desk-bound jobs over the past decades have resulted in limiting opportunities for other forms of activity during the working day. Adults spend about six hours a day engaged in sedentary pursuits, such as watching TV and other screen time, reading and other low-energy activities. On average, men and women spend 2.8 hours watching television per weekday and this rises to about three hours on weekends. [Source: NHS – Britain: ‘the fat man of Europe’](#)

More families travel to foreign countries during holidays as part of their leisure time. This can have an impact on eating patterns and dishes from other countries can be bought as processed foods and ready meals. Alcohol is consumed as part of leisure time and is viewed as a normal part of relaxation.

## ? Revision Questions

**1** Propose and justify lifestyle advice to achieve a healthy weight.

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**2** Suggest reasons why leisure patterns can increase the risk of obesity.

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**3** Explain how demographics and employment patterns can increase the risk of dietary disorder.

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## Revision Questions

- 4 Examine the food habits of your family. How have they changed over the last five years? If so, give reasons for any changes and identify what patterns have been consistent.

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- 5 Complete the table below to summarise the barriers that prevent individuals eating healthy food.

Factor	Examples	Impact on food choices
Demographics		
Social changes		
Employment patterns		
Leisure patterns		

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