

**US Food and Nutrition Security During COVID-19 in Late 2021**

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**Objectives:** To assess current and altered food habits about two years into the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Methods:** We recruited a national sample of 1,878 adults balanced by age (18–34 years, 35–49, 50–64, 65+); sex (male, female); race/ethnicity (Non-Hispanic White, Hispanic/Latinx, Non-Hispanic Black/African-American, Asian/Other); and income (<25k/year, 25k-<50k, 50-<100k, >100k). In fall 2021, participants completed a 44-item survey asking about demographics, priorities for food businesses and products, and a 5-item section on food habit changes due to COVID-19. 1420 participants added free-text to explain changes in food habits which were evaluated for themes.

**Results:** 12% of respondents (n = 223) reported worsened food security, 49% (n = 914) reported about same, and 39% (n = 722) reported improved food security compared to pre-pandemic. 11% (n = 200) reported worsened, 42% (n = 784) reported the same,

and 47% (n = 878) reported improved healthfulness of food choices. Changes in food security explained 27% of the variance in changes in healthfulness of food choice ( $p < 0.05$ ). 20% of respondents (n = 370) reported having less ability to choose where they eat. Nearly twice as many (39%, n = 737) reported that it stayed the same or improved (40%, n = 747). 12% (n = 229) reported less ability to choose where to buy food, 48% reported the same (n = 904), and 39% (n = 731) reported improved ability. Changes did not differ dramatically by age, sex, race/ethnicity, or income. Six common themes of pandemic changes in food habits were reduced restaurant dining, increased food delivery, reduced soft drink consumption, more eating at home, taking the opportunity to eat healthy, and more bulk and discount shopping online.

**Conclusions:** As Americans adapt to the pandemic, these novel data identify perceived effects on food and nutrition security. These data illustrate relative resiliency in both food security and the healthfulness of food choices, and pandemic-related opportunities to increase healthfulness of dietary choices, in a diverse national sample.

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