

# Parental views on diet and behaviours in Scotland (2021)

## Context

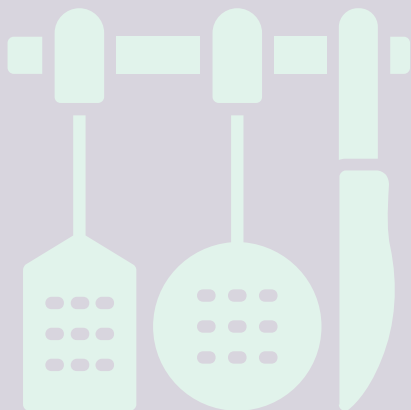
This briefing document summarises findings from a recent survey among parents in Scotland, exploring their family's diet and food related behaviours, and the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on these.

## About the survey

Ipsos Scotland run an annual omnibus survey to explore the attitudes and views of parents in Scotland. Food Standards Scotland (FSS) commissioned Ipsos Scotland to include questions on attitudes to healthy eating, sustainability, and the impact of COVID-19 on diet as part of this omnibus. Telephone interviews were conducted between 1<sup>st</sup> November and 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2021 with a representative sample of 1,004 parents living in Scotland, who have children between the ages of 0 and 18 years.

## Key findings

- In this survey of parents living in Scotland, almost everyone reported that they eat away from home with their child at some point, with only 3% reporting that they rarely do this.
- The majority of parents (80%) reported that they usually visit sit down restaurants or cafes when eating away from home with their child. However, parents reported that they usually use multiple ways of eating away from home, including buying food to eat on the go (59%), as well as taking food from home (74%).
- Most parents (84%) agreed that it was either very important or somewhat important that healthy were options available for their child when eating out.
- Almost a third (31%) consider environmental sustainability a great deal when buying and/or preparing meals for their family, while 42% consider this a little.



- More than half of parents (57%) generally consider healthy eating to be more of a priority over environmental sustainability when buying and/or preparing meals for their family. Only 3% of all parents considered environmental sustainability to be more of a priority over healthy eating when planning family meals. Almost a third (32%) felt that they were equal priorities when buying and/or preparing meals for their family.
- Just under a fifth (17%) felt that since the COVID-19 pandemic, their child's diet has become less healthy, while 13% felt that their child's diet has become healthier.
- A third of parents (34%) felt that their own diet has become less healthy since the COVID-19 pandemic, while 17% felt it has become healthier. However, just under half of all parents surveyed felt there has been no difference since in their diet since the COVID-19 pandemic.

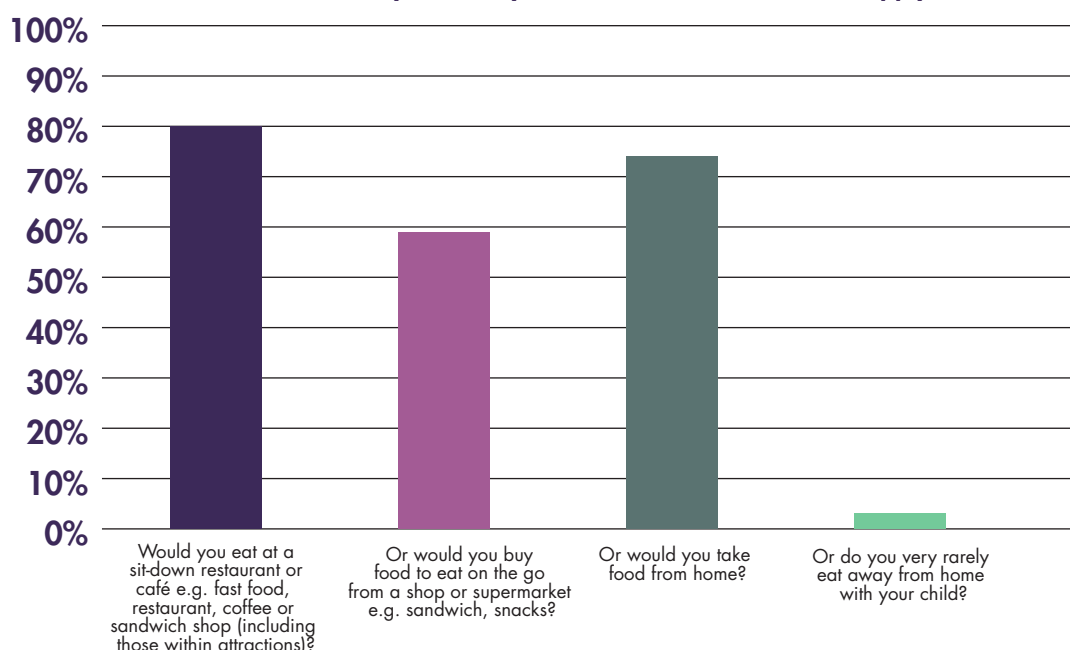
## Where do parents usually take their child when eating away from home?

Almost all parents who responded to the survey reported that they eat away from home with their child, with only 3% stating that they rarely do this.

The data shows that parents usually use multiple ways of eating away from home, including the use of sit down restaurants or cafes, buying food to eat on the go, as well as taking food from home.

The majority of parents (80%) reported that they usually choose to visit sit down restaurants or cafes when eating away from home with their child. However, three quarters (74%) of parents said that they would take food from home when out, while many (59%) also said that they would buy food to eat on the go.

When eating away from home with your child, where would you usually choose to eat? Select all that apply.



There were some differences in how parents would choose to eat out depending on the age of their child. For example, parents with younger children (up to 11 years) were more likely to say that they would take food from home for their child, compared to parents of older children.

In addition, parents who work full or part time, and those living in the least deprived areas of Scotland (SIMD 5), were more likely to take their child to sit-down restaurants/cafes compared to the overall average.

## When eating out, how important is it that healthy options are available for children?

Most parents surveyed (84%) agreed that it was either very important or somewhat important that healthy options were available for their child when eating out.

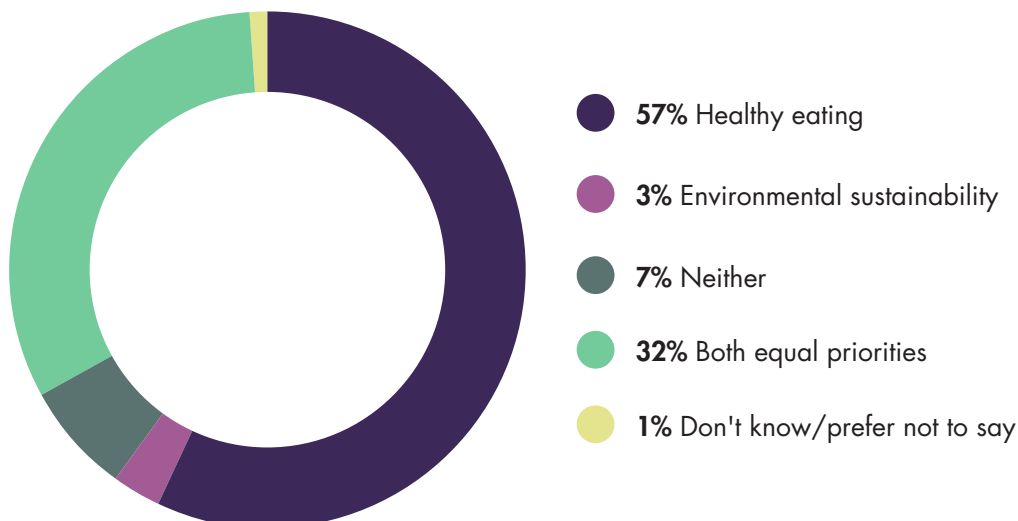
Parents of 0-4 year olds were also more likely to choose 'very important' (66%) compared to parents of children aged 5-11 (33%) or 12-17 (29%).

## Priorities when planning family meals

Just under a third (31%) of parents said that they consider environmental sustainability a great deal when buying and/or preparing meals for their family, while two in five (42%) said they considered this a little. A quarter of parents (26%) said they didn't consider environmental sustainability very much or at all.

However, when asked whether healthy eating or environmental sustainability is more of a priority (if either) when buying and/or preparing meals for their family, more than half (57%) of parents consider healthy eating to be more of a priority, while only 3% of all parents surveyed said that they consider environmental sustainability to be more of a priority. One third (32%) of parents said that they consider both healthy eating and environmental sustainability to be of equal priority when buying and/or preparing meals for their family.

**In general, which of these, if either, is more of a priority when buying and/or preparing meals for your family?**



## How the COVID-19 pandemic has affected parents' own diet

Overall, 34% of parents reported that their own diet has become less healthy since the COVID-19 pandemic, while 17% of parents reported it has become healthier. However, almost half (49%) of those surveyed reported that their own diet was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parents aged 16-34 years were significantly more likely to say that their own diet had become less healthy since the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to older age groups.

## How the COVID-19 pandemic has affected children's diet

Overall, 17% of parents reported that since the COVID-19 pandemic, their child's diet has become less healthy. Conversely, 13% of parents felt that their child's diet has become healthier. However, most parents (70%) believed that the COVID-19 pandemic had not affected their child's diet.

Among parents who reported that their child's diet had become less healthy since the COVID-19 pandemic, 75% said that their own diet had also become less healthy. Only 7% said their diet had become healthier.

Conversely, 57% of parents who said that their child's diet had become healthier since the COVID-19 pandemic also said that their own diet had become healthier, while 26% said it had become less healthy.

## Conclusion

In this survey of parents living in Scotland, almost all respondents reported eating away from home with their child, with only 3% reporting that they rarely do this. The majority of parents surveyed also use the out of home (OOH) food and drink sector when doing so, including both 'on the go' and full or quick service restaurants/cafés. Previous FSS findings highlighted that purchasing for children makes up more than 10% of OOH trips, with quick service restaurants and convenience retailers the most popular when purchasing for children.<sup>1</sup> With most parents agreeing that it is important that healthy are options available for their child when eating out, improving the range of healthy food and drink choices available on children's menus is crucial.

The findings also highlight that while many parents take environmental sustainability into consideration when buying and/or preparing family meals, more than half of parents consider healthy eating to be a more of a priority. This suggests that parents may be more receptive to messages around health when planning meals, rather than environmental sustainability.

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected many aspects of our lives, with changes to our daily patterns and diet related behaviours. While some parents reported changes to their own diet, and their child's diet, some also reported positive or no changes.

<sup>1</sup> [The Out of Home Environment in Scotland \(2019\) | Food Standards Scotland](#)

Parents may face conflicting pressures and constraints which influence food related behaviours and priorities, including size of family, age of children, household income and working status. Therefore, it is important that messaging for public health and dietary improvement is diverse and inclusive of all household types in Scotland, to reduce health inequalities.

These findings complement and add to existing FSS data on monitoring trends in consumer behaviours and attitudes regarding diet to support policy development and appropriate messaging to consumers.

