

Eating patterns and behaviours inside the home in Scotland in 2021

Introduction

This briefing summarises insights into eating patterns and behaviours inside the home, in Scotland, during 2021. The results have been compared with reported in 2019 and during 2021. This data was provided by Kantar, a market research company who collect information on how often food and drink is consumed in the home, alongside information such as when, where and why.

The data refers to food and drink consumed inside the home and includes takeaways which are delivered direct to the home, and any food prepared inside the home which is then 'carried out' of the home for consumption.

Key Findings

- In 2021, the number of eating and drinking occasions inside the home decreased by 2% compared to 2020. However, this was still higher than in 2019.
- Eating lunch at home increased as a result of the pandemic, and this continued into 2021.
- Enjoyment and practicality were the most important motivators of consumption inside the home during 2021. Health was seen as a less important motivator and has declined since 2019.
- The average amount of time spent preparing lunch and evening meals combined was 22.7 minutes in 2021. This was a slight decline since 2019.
- Assembled meals, which involves bringing together multiple items on a plate, remains the most prominent type of food preparation method, accounting for 73.3% of main meals in 2021.
- Meals which were vegan or vegetarian accounted for 18% and 26% of main meals inside the home meals during 2021. There was an increase for vegan (20%) and vegetarian (15%) meals compared to 2019.

Occasions: An individual's eating or drinking moment

Methodology

Kantar collect longitudinal information on purchases into the home from a large household consumer panel of around 30,000 panellists in Great Britain. Around 11,000 of these panellists also record the food and drink they eat at home or carry out (around 1,000 people in Scotland). This subset of the main purchasing panel is called the usage panel.

- Each panellist completes an average of four, week-long diaries each year, recording all the foods and drinks they consume at home or carry out, on behalf of all individuals in the household including children of all ages.
- Each time food or drink is consumed by a panellist it is recorded as an eating occasion.
- Panellists are not asked to weigh their food, so the data does not provide information on the quantities of food and drink consumed.
- The usage panel does not include any food or drink purchased or consumed outside of the home (OOH), for example from restaurants, cafes, or 'on the go'. This information is collected by another subset of the main purchasing panel.

Eating and drinking inside the home

After the first national lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, eating and drinking occasions inside the home increased substantially, reaching 656 million in May 2020. Subsequently in 2021, the number of occasions at home declined, although levels remained 17% higher than 2019.

In 2021, the increase in occasions inside the home compared to 2019 were most notable among those in social classes AB and C1, which are typically most affluent, and adults aged 35-44 years.

Meal and snacking occasions

Where people in Scotland consume meals and snacks has continued to change since the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, although more snacks were being consumed inside the home in 2021 compared to 2019, there was also a reduction in snacking occasions outside the home. Overall, this resulted in a decline of 10 million snacking occasions in 2021, particularly among families (-6%) and households aged under 45 years with no children (-20%). Fruit remained the top snack in 2021 however, many snacking occasions involved discretionary food categories such as chocolate confectionery and cakes and pasties.

Social grade classifications

Class A: Upper Middle Class; Higher Managerial Position

Class B: Middle Class; Intermediate Managerial

Class C1: Lower Middle; Junior Managerial, Supervisory, Clerical Workers

Class C2: Skilled Working Class; Skilled Manual Workers, Craftsmen, Specialist

Class D: Working Class; Semi/Unskilled Manual Workers, Apprentices, Labourers

Class E: Non-working

In 2021, eating breakfast at home was 8% higher compared to 2019. Similarly, despite a slight decline in lunch occasions inside the home since 2020 (-3%), levels remained 41% higher compared to 2019. The increase in evening meals consumed at home between 2019 and 2020 remained into 2021.

Drivers of choice

Enjoyment and practicality remained the most important drivers of consumption inside the home in 2021. Meanwhile, health as a driver for consumption generally declined, compared to 2019. Health was least likely to be selected as a driver of consumption of meals among families, declining from 30.2% of occasions in 2019 to 24.4% in 2021. Snack consumption among younger households with no children was least likely to be driven by health.

Preparing and cooking food

Average preparation times for lunch and evening meals combined declined slightly compared to 2019 and 2020, but remained largely flat at 22.7 minutes in 2021. Families took the most time to prepare their meals, at 13.2 minutes for lunch and 33.2 minutes for evening meals. Meanwhile, younger households with no children took the least amount of time, at 10.7 minutes for lunch and 28.3 minutes for evening meals.

The use of assembled meals remained the most prominent type of food preparation in 2021 (73.3%), despite a slight decline compared to 2020 (73.7%). In addition, the use of convenience meals increased across all household types, peaking at its highest level in several years by the end of 2021.

Overall levels of scratch and assisted cooking declined in 2021 compared to 2020. However, scratch cooking increased among families during this time, who were found to cook from scratch more than all other household types.

Meal preparation techniques include:

- Scratch cooking
- Assisted cooking, such as the use of pre made cooking sauces and meal kits
- Assembled meals, where multiple items are brought together on a plate
- Convenience meals, such as ready meals which are cooked at home
- Delivered takeaways

Top meal categories and dishes

Breakfast cereals (53.6%) and bread (24.0%) accounted for the majority of breakfasts in the home in 2021. The most common lunch dishes were sandwiches (36%) and soup (8%), while roast dinners (4.6%) and pizzas (3.4%) were found to be the top evening meal dishes.

In 2021, meat, fish & poultry accounted for 56% of main meals, compared with vegetarian and vegan meals accounting of 26% and 18%, respectively. There was an increase for vegan (20%) and vegetarian (15%) meals compared to 2019.

Desserts consumed at lunch increased in 2021 compared to 2019 and 2020, whereas consuming desserts during evening meal occasions decreased below levels seen in 2019.

Alcohol

Consumption of alcoholic drinks inside the home increased during the initial period following the first national lockdown in 2020, most notably among households over 45 years with no children and families. However, this steadily decreased throughout 2021, and the with consumption among families declining the most between 2021 and 2020.

Summary and conclusion

The findings in this report highlight that as COVID-19 restrictions eased throughout 2021, the frequency of food and drink occasions inside the home decreased but still remain higher than pre-pandemic levels in 2019.

The report provides useful insights into changes to our the eating patterns and behaviours, and how they have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic and how this has impacted different household types during 2020 and 2021. As people have returned to working patters more similar to those pre-pandemic some shifts have been observed in the number of lunch, snack and alcohol occasions inside the home.

Similarly, how people in Scotland prepare food inside the home has also changed during this time. While families were found to cook from scratch more than other household types, overall, scratch and assisted cooking declined in 2021 compared 2020. In addition, the use of assembled meals remained the most prominent type of food preparation during 2021.

Enjoyment and practicality continued to be the most important drivers of consumption when choosing what to eat at home in 2021. However, health as a driver for consumption remained considerably less important in 2021 compared to 2019.

Overall, these findings complement and add to existing evidence monitoring trends in food purchasing and consumption behaviours. This data forms part of the FSS dietary monitoring programme and will be used to support and policy development, and inform public health communications and consumer advice.