

Exploring the impact of COVID-19 on eating patterns and behaviours inside the home in Scotland

Introduction

This briefing summarises insights into the impact of COVID-19 on eating behaviours inside the home in Scotland in 2020.

This data was provided by Kantar, a market research company who collect information on how often food and drink is consumed at home, alongside information such as when, where and why.

The data refers to food and drink consumed inside the home and includes any takeaways which are delivered direct to the home.



Key Findings

- After the first national lockdown in 2020, the number of eating occasions at home increased by 23%, compared to the same weeks in 2019.
- Over the same time period, the number of eating out occasions reduced by 48% and the number of meals we 'carried out' reduced by 58%.
- Snacking at home increased by 31%, particularly during the day. Of all life stage groups, families with children drove this uplift the most.
- The consumption of alcoholic drinks at home also increased after the first national lockdown was announced, peaking at 34 million occasions in May 2020.
- In 2020, 71% of eating occasions inside the home were driven by taste, while only 16% were driven by potential benefits to health.
- Compared to 2019, levels of scratch cooking among families and households under the age of 45 years with no children declined after the first national lockdown was announced in March 2020.



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 4, 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 Occasions at home in 2020

Before the national lockdown in March 2020, the average number of eating occasions inside the home in Scotland was 462 million per month. Since lockdown, this increased substantially, reaching 656 million in May 2020, and remained greater than pre-lockdown levels for the rest of 2020.

Eating together

In the 12 weeks after the first national lockdown began, 89% of eating occasions at home had all household members present. However, panellists were slightly less likely to describe their eating occasion as "together time" throughout 2020, compared to 2019.

Where 3 or more people were present at the same eating occasion, an additional 8 minutes was spent making a main meal compared to occasions where only 1 or 2 people were present. However, it was also 22% less likely that health would be considered as a reason for food choice.

Drivers of choice

Since the first national lockdown, 71% of eating occasions at home were driven by taste, compared to just 16% being driven by potential benefits to health.

Health as a driver of choice for meal and snack occasions also declined in 2020 compared to 2019, particularly within families and households under the age of 45 years with no children.



Preparing and cooking food

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

Scratch and assisted cooking were the most common preparation methods for evening meals in 2020, whereas assembled cooking accounted for the majority of lunch meals.

In 2020, preparing and cooking meals from scratch took 42 minutes per occasion, while assembled meals took 17 minutes. Assembled meals were also the cheapest to prepare at just £1.31 per person, whereas delivered takeaways were the most expensive at £8.14 per person (excluding delivery charges).

The amount of time spent making meals increased slightly after lockdown in 2020, compared to 2019. For example, in 2019 an average of 32 minutes were spent preparing an evening meal, compared to 33 minutes in 2020.

Compared to 2019, levels of scratch cooking among families and households under the age of 45 years with no children declined after the first national lockdown was announced. In contrast, households over 45 years old with no children reported an increase in scratch cooking and this was sustained throughout the rest of 2020. Overall, levels of assisted cooking for evening meals increased from 14% to 16% after the national lockdown was announced in 2020.

Snacking

After the first national lockdown in 2020, snacking at home increased by 31%, compared to 2019.

However, as a result of COVID-19 restrictions on the hospitality industry, snacking occasions outside the home also decreased during this time. Taking this reduction into consideration, it was found that overall snacking increased by 1%.

Families with children increased their snacking occasions at home the most in the first 12 weeks after the national lockdown (73%). The most common types of food and drink included in these snacks were fruit, chocolate confectionery and biscuits.

Alcoholic drinks

More alcoholic drinks were being consumed at home in the initial period following the national lockdown in 2020, peaking at 34 million occasions in May 2020.

Families increased their consumption of alcoholic drinks at home the most out of all household types, with an increase of 69% in the first 12 weeks after the national lockdown was announced. However consumption by the end of the year was 17% lower than the same point in 2019.



Summary and conclusion

The findings in this report highlight increased consumption of food and drink inside the home during 2020, particularly after the first national lockdown was announced in March. This was observed during a period of time when there was a reduction in food and drink consumed outside the home. Advice to stay at home, and the closure of schools and many workplaces, will likely have contributed to changes in consumption patterns moving from out of home to inside the home.

These findings provide useful insights into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the eating patterns of different household types, at home, during different time points of 2020. For example, families with children reported a decline in levels of scratch cooking, more snacking and an increase in occasions with alcoholic drinks inside the home. The report also highlights the continued importance of taste and functionality when choosing what to eat at home. However, health as a driver for consumption remains considerably less important and declined in 2020 compared to 2019.

This report complements and adds to existing evidence that monitors trends in food purchasing and consumption behaviors. This data forms part of the FSS dietary monitoring programme and will be used to support and policy development, and public health communications and dietary messaging.

