



Dietary Habits

An AARP Bulletin Poll

Data Collected by Social Science Research Solutions (SSRS)
Report Prepared by Cheryl L. Lampkin, Ph.D.

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Executive Summary

In an effort to learn more about adult's dietary habits, in September 2012, AARP Research & Strategic Analysis fielded a short telephone survey among a nationally representative sample of adults age 18+.

Key Findings

- Generally, adults 18-49 and those 50+ have similar dietary habits.
- Adults skip meals regularly—especially breakfast. While about a third of the adult population says they never skip meals, half of the adult age 18 to 49 say they skip breakfast regularly and three in ten adults age 50+ say they skip breakfast regularly.
- In a typical day, adults try to eat at least one or two servings from the following food groups: grains, fruits and vegetables, and dairy. About a third of the adult population eats at least two servings of fruit, vegetables, grains and dairy everyday.
- By and large, adults 18-49 and those 50+ have the same dietary habits when looking at protein (i.e., red meat, pork, poultry, etc.) consumption. However, the age groups differ in the amount of fish they eat in an average week. Older adults eat fish more frequently. Adults in the older age group (age 50+) are more likely than those in the younger age group (18-49) to say they eat fish once or twice a week.
- Adults also love to snack; however, it is not all “bad” foods. About half of the adults say they snack on fruit and vegetables everyday. A quarter of the adults say they tend to eat sweets everyday and only one in ten adults say they eat salty snacks everyday. Interestingly, only 1 percent of the adult population say they never eat the snacks listed in the survey.

Summary/Conclusions

Results from this survey suggest overall adults 18-49 and those 50+ have similar dietary habits.

Adults skip meals regularly. While about a third of the adult population says they never skip meals, half of the adult age 18 to 49 say they skip breakfast and three in ten adults age 50+ say they skip breakfast.

In a typical day, about a third of the adult population eats at least two servings of fruit, vegetables, grains and dairy. The younger age group (18-49) is more likely than the 50+ to eat a little more fruit and grain daily. A third of the adult population say they snack on sweets, salty snacks and fresh fruit and vegetables a few times a week. Older adults (age 50+) are more likely than the younger adults (18-49) to say they rarely or never eat salty snacks.

Generally, adults 18-49 and those 50+ have the same dietary habits when looking at protein (i.e., red meat, pork, poultry, etc.) consumption. However, there is a difference among the age groups in the amount of fish they eat in an average week. Adults in the older age group (age 50+) are more likely than the younger age group (18-49) to say they eat fish once or twice a week.

Interestingly, over half of the adults age 21 and older say they do not drink alcohol. Younger adults (21-49) are more likely than older adults (50+) to say they drink one or less alcoholic beverages daily.

Background

In September 2012, AARP Research & Strategic Analysis contracted with Social Science Research Solutions (SSRS) to field a telephone survey among a nationally representative sample of adults age 18 and older to learn more about their dietary habits.

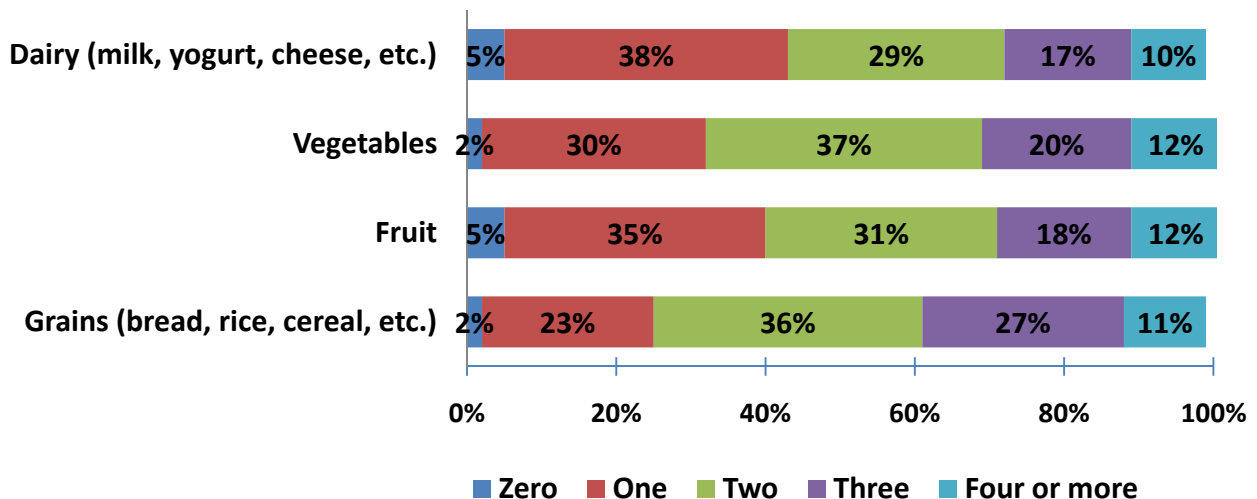
In this survey, respondents were asked about how often they ate from a variety of food groups such as fruits, vegetables, grains, protein (i.e., red meat, poultry, fish, etc.) and dairy products. Respondents were also asked how often they ate snacks such as cookies, popcorn and potato chips. Finally respondents were asked about how much they drank a variety of beverages such as water, coffee, sodas and alcohol.

Detailed Findings¹

Amount of General Food Groups Consumed Daily

Respondents were asked how often they ate from various food groups in a typical day. As Figure 1 shows, nearly four in ten (38%) eat three or more servings of grain daily, while just over three in ten (32%) eat three or more servings of vegetables on a typical day. Three in ten (30%) say they eat three or more servings of fruit each day. Nearly two in five (38%) say they usually only eat one serving of dairy in a typical day.

**Figure 1: Number of Times Typically Eat from Food Group Daily
(n=1,012)**



¹ This study was conducted via telephone from September 21 – September 27, 2012 among a nationally representative sample of 1,012 respondents age 18 and older. The margin of error for total respondents is +/-3.08% at the 95% confidence level. A little over one-third (36%) of the respondents are age 18 to 49 and two-thirds (64%) are age 50 and older. Gender representation is pretty evenly split (51% female; 49% male). Two-thirds (67%) are white, non-Hispanic; one in nine (12%) are Black/African American, non-Hispanic; and thirteen percent are Hispanic. Just over four in ten had a high school diploma (32%) or less (13%), while nearly one in three had some college (26%) or technical school training (2%). Just over one-quarter had a college (17%) or postgraduate education (11%). One in three (31%) reported a household income of less than \$30,000, while nearly one in five (19%) reported an annual household income between \$30,000 and \$49,999. Another fourteen percent reported an annual household income between \$50,000 and \$74,999 and one-quarter (25%) reported an annual household income of \$75,000 or more.

Comparing Table 1 to Table 2, adults age 50 and older are more likely than those age 18-49 to say they eat one serving of grains on a typical day (30% vs. 18%). The oldest cohort was also more likely than the 18-49 year olds to say they eat one serving of fruit (39% vs. 31%) on a typical day. The adults in the 18-49 year old cohort are more likely than adults in the 50 and older group to say they consume four or more dairy products on a typical day (12% vs. 7%).

Table 1: Number of Times Typically Eat from Food Group Daily, 18 to 49 Age Group (n=361)

| | Zero % | One % | Two % | Three % | Four+ % |
|-------------------|--------|-------|-------|---------|---------|
| Grains | 1 | 18 | 35 | 31 | 14 |
| Fruit | 4 | 31 | 33 | 19 | 13 |
| Vegetables | 2 | 28 | 36 | 21 | 13 |
| Dairy | 4 | 36 | 28 | 18 | 12 |

Table 2: Number of Times Typically Eat from Food Group Daily, 50+ Age Group (n=650)

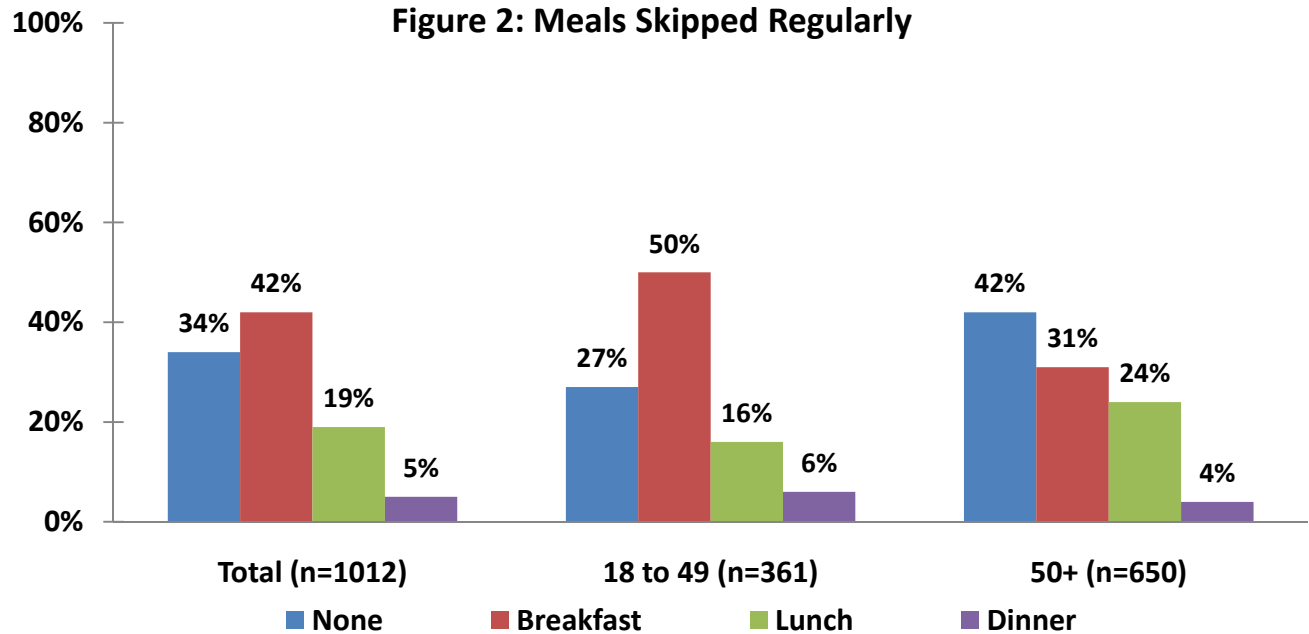
| | Zero % | One % | Two % | Three % | Four+ % |
|-------------------|--------|-----------|-------|---------|----------|
| Grains | 4 | 30 | 35 | 23 | 7 |
| Fruit | 6 | 39 | 28 | 17 | 10 |
| Vegetables | 2 | 34 | 38 | 18 | 9 |
| Dairy | 7 | 41 | 31 | 15 | 7 |

Bold percentage indicates a significant difference between age groups; $p \leq 0.05$.

Interestingly, regardless of age, respondents with an annual household income of less than \$25,000 are less likely than respondents with incomes \$25,000 or more to say they eat two servings of grain in a typical day (26% vs. 40%-44%).

Skipping Meals

As Shown in Figure 2, one-third (34%) of the adults say they do not regularly skip meals. The meal most commonly skipped is breakfast (42%). Half (50%) of the 18 to 49 year olds say they regularly skip breakfast, compared to only three in ten (31%) adults age 50 or older who say they regularly skip breakfast. Though the older group (age 50+) are more likely than the 18 to 49 year olds to say they never skip a meal (42% vs. 27%), the older group is more likely than the younger group to say they skip lunch (24% vs. 16%). Only a small percentage of people say they skip dinner (5%).



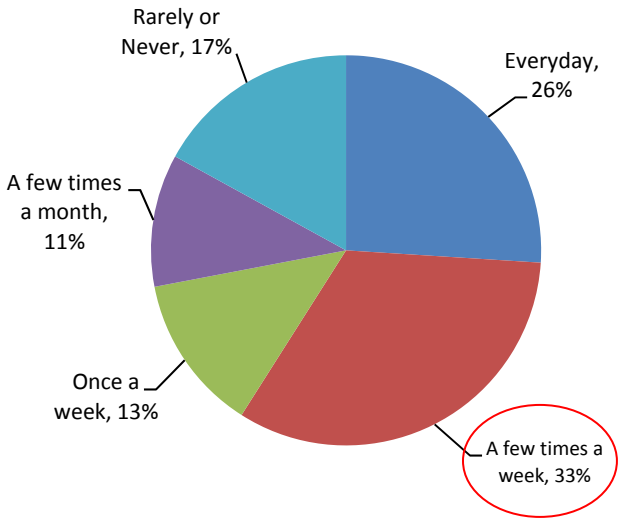
Eating Snacks

Survey participants were asked how often (i.e., daily, few times a week, once a week, etc.) they eat snacks such as popcorn, protein bars, cookies, cakes and fresh fruit and vegetables (for a snack). Figure 3 illustrates how often adults eat various types of snacks. One-third say they eat the following snacks a few times a week: sweets (33%), salty snacks (33%) and fresh fruit or vegetables (33%). Two thirds (67%) say they do not eat protein or energy bars. Slight more than one in five (22%) say they rarely or never eat salty snacks and one in six (17%) say they rarely or never eat sweet snacks.

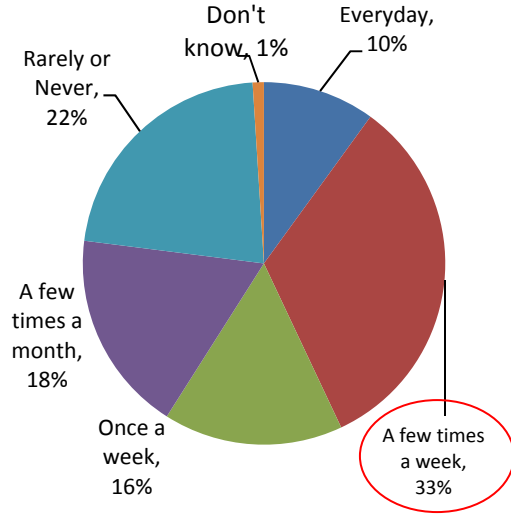
Interestingly, only 1% say they rarely or never eat any of these items for a snack. The 50+ cohort is more likely than the 18-49 year olds to say they rarely or never eat salty foods (27% vs. 19%). Though the large majority (67%) say they rarely or never eat energy or protein bars, 18-49 year olds are more likely than the 50+ to say they eat energy or protein bars everyday (9% vs. 5%).

Figure 3: Frequency Eat Sweets, Salty Snacks Protein Bars and Fresh Fruit/Vegetables

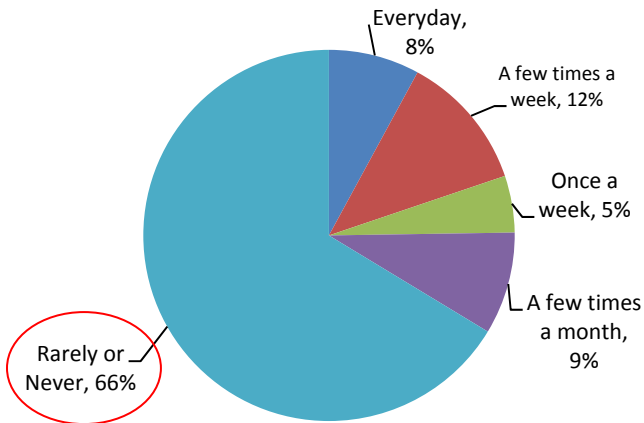
Sweets



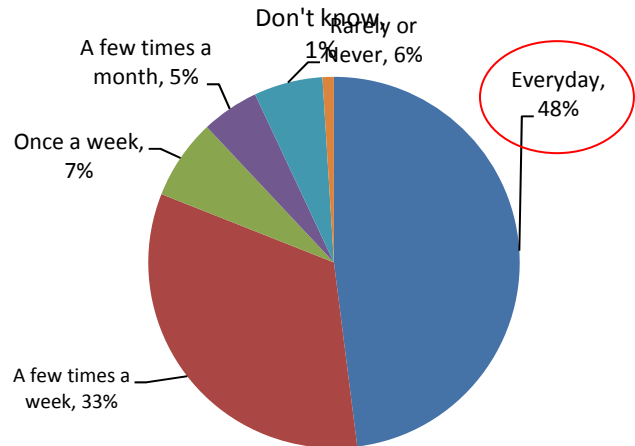
Salty Snacks



Energy/Protein Bars



Fresh Fruit/Vegetables



Note: Percentages may not match annotated questionnaire due to rounding

Eating Meat, Poultry, and Fish

Survey participants were asked how many times a week they eat red meat (i.e., beef, lamb, veal, etc.), chicken or turkey, pork, fish, and processed meats (i.e., bacon, deli meats, hot dogs, etc.). With a few exceptions, there generally is no significant difference between the 18 -49 year olds and the 50+ in how often they eat red meat, poultry and pork:

- 58% of the 50+ and 59% of the 18-49 year olds eat pork 1-2 times per week
- 55% of the 50+ and 48% of the 18-49 year olds eat red meat 1-2 times per week
- 50% of the 50+ and 54% of the 18-49 year olds eat processed meats 1-2 times per week
- 44% of the 50+ and 43% of the 18-49 year olds eat chicken/turkey 1-2 times per week

There are significant differences between the age groups when looking how often they eat fish in a typical week. While over on-third (36%) of the 18-49 year olds say they do not typically eat fish, one-quarter (25%) of the 50+ say they do not typically eat fish. And as one might expect, while nearly two-thirds (62%) of the 50+ say they eat fish once or twice a week, half (51%) of the 18-49 year olds say they eat fish one to two times a week.

A higher percentage of adults age 50 and older compared to adults age 18-49 say they never eat processed meats such as lunch meats, hotdogs and bacon (28% vs. 21%). This difference is significant.

Beverage Consumption

Nearly everyone says they drink two or more glasses of water a day (92% for 50+; 94% for 18-49). A higher percentage of adults age 50 and older compared to those 18-49 say they never drink regular soft drinks on a typical day (28% vs. 19%). This difference is significant. However, the same proportions in each age group say they drink one soft drink a day (45% for each age group). Only slightly more 18-49 year olds than adults age 50 and older say they drink two to four soft drinks a days (28% for 18-49; 22% for 50+).

Significantly more adults age 50 and older compared to adults 18-49 drink coffee (72% vs. 61%). As noted in Table 3, while nearly three in ten (28%) adults age 50 or older say they never drink coffee, four in ten (40%) adults age 18-49 say they never drink coffee. When looking at those who say they drink two to four cups of coffee a day, just over four in ten (42%) adults age 50 and older say they drink between two and four cups, compared to only just over two in ten (23%) adults age 18-49.

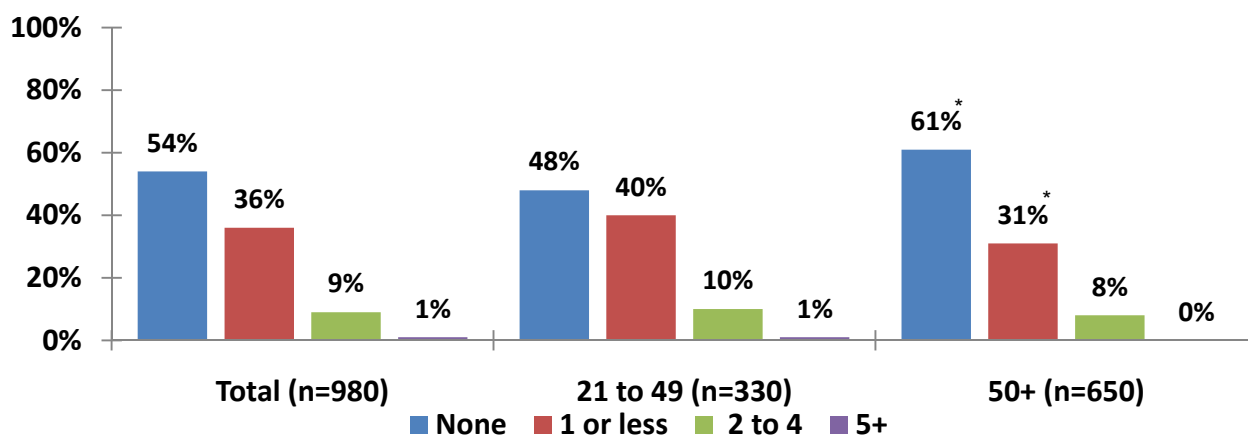
Table 3: Number of Cups of Coffee Typically Consumed Daily, by Age Group

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| None | 35 | 40 | 28 |
| 1 cup (6 ounces) or less | 28 | 33 | 23 |
| 2 to 4 cups | 31 | 23 | 42 |
| 5 cups or more | 6 | 5 | 7 |
| Don't Know/Refused | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Bold percentage indicates a significant difference between age groups; $p <= 0.05$. May not add to 100% due to rounding.

Figure 4 presents the average number of alcoholic beverages typically consumed daily by age group. Over half (54%) of the adults age 21 and older say they do not drink alcohol, while a little more than one-third (36%) say they drink one or less alcoholic beverages a day. Significantly more adults age 50 and older compared to adults 21-49 say they never drink alcohol (61% vs. 48%). While four in ten (40%) adults age 21-49 say they drink one or less alcoholic beverages a day, only three in ten (31%) adults age 50+ say they drink they drink two to four alcoholic beverages a day. This difference is also significant.

Figure 4: Number Alcoholic Beverages Typically Consumed Daily, by Age Group (21-49 & 50+)



Summary/Conclusions

Results from this survey suggest overall adults 18-49 and those 50+ have similar dietary habits.

Adults skip meals regularly. While about a third of the adult population say they never skip meals, half of the adult age 18 to 49 say they skip breakfast and three in ten adults age 50+ say they skip breakfast.

In a typical day, about a third of the adult population eats at least two servings of fruit, vegetables, grains and dairy. The younger age group (18-49) is more likely than the 50+ to eat a little more fruit and grain daily. A third of the adult population say they snack on sweets, salty snacks and fresh fruit and vegetables a few times a week. Older adults (age 50+) are more likely than the younger adults (18-49) to say they rarely or never eat salty snacks.

Generally, adults 18-49 and those 50+ have the same dietary habits when looking at protein (i.e., red meat, pork, poultry, etc.) consumption. However, there is a difference between age groups in the amount of fish they eat in an average week. Adults in the older age group (age 50+) are more likely than the younger age group (18-49) to say they eat fish once or twice a week.

Interestingly, over half of the adults age 21 and older say they do not drink alcohol. Younger adults (21-49) are more likely than older adults (50+) to say they drink one or less alcoholic beverages daily.

Appendix A: Annotated Questionnaire

Bulletin Diet Survey – Annotated Questionnaire²
Conducted: September 21-27, 2012
(n=1,012, 18+)

Question 1: In a typical day, how often do you eat the following foods?

a. Grains such as bread, rice, cereal, oatmeal

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Zero | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| One | 23 | 18 | 30 |
| Two | 36 | 35 | 35 |
| Three | 27 | 31 | 23 |
| 4 times or more | 11 | 14 | 7 |
| Don't Know/Refused | <1 | <1 | 1 |

b. Fruits

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Zero | 5 | 4 | 6 |
| One | 35 | 31 | 39 |
| Two | 31% | 33 | 28 |
| Three | 18 | 19 | 17 |
| 4 times or more | 12 | 13 | 10 |
| Don't Know/Refused | <1 | <1 | 0 |

c. Vegetables

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Zero | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| One | 30 | 28 | 34 |
| Two | 37 | 36 | 38 |
| Three | 20 | 21 | 18 |
| 4 times or more | 12 | 13 | 9 |
| Don't Know/Refused | <1 | 1% | <1 |

d. Dairy such as milk, yogurt, cheese

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Zero | 5 | 4 | 7 |
| One | 38 | 36 | 41 |
| Two | 29 | 28 | 31 |
| Three | 17 | 18 | 15 |
| 4 times or more | 10 | 12 | 7 |
| Don't Know/Refused | 1 | 1 | <1 |

² Weighted data. Bold percentages indicate a significant difference between age group at the p<= .05 level.

Question 2: Which meal(s) do you skip regularly?

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Breakfast | 42 | 50 | 31 |
| Lunch | 19 | 16 | 24 |
| Dinner | 5 | 6 | 4 |
| None/Never skip meals | 34 | 27 | 42 |
| Don't Know/Refused | 2 | 3% | 1 |

Question 3: How often do you eat (INSERT ITEM)? Would you say ...?

a. Sweets such as cookies, candy, pastries

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Everyday | 26 | 24 | 29 |
| A few times a week | 33 | 32 | 34 |
| Once a week | 13 | 13 | 13 |
| A few times a month | 11 | 12 | 11 |
| Rarely/never | 17 | 19 | 14 |
| Don't Know/Refused | <1 | 0 | <1 |

b. Salty snacks such as popcorn, potato chips, nuts

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Everyday | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| A few times a week | 33 | 35 | 31 |
| Once a week | 16 | 16 | 17 |
| A few times a month | 18 | 19 | 16 |
| Rarely/never | 22 | 19 | 27 |
| Don't Know/Refused | <1 | <1 | <1 |

c. Energy or protein bars

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Everyday | 8 | 9 | 5 |
| A few times a week | 12 | 12 | 12 |
| Once a week | 5 | 5 | 5 |
| A few times a month | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| Rarely/never | 67 | 65 | 69 |
| Don't Know/Refused | <1 | 0 | <1 |

Question 3: (continued) How often do you eat (INSERT ITEM)? Would you say ...?

d. Fresh fruit or vegetables such as carrots, celery

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|---------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Everyday | 48 | 47 | 49% |
| A few times a week | 33 | 33 | 32 |
| Once a week | 7 | 8 | 7 |
| A few times a month | 5 | 6 | 5 |
| Rarely/never | 6 | 6 | 7 |
| Don't Know/Refused | <1 | 0 | 1 |

Question 4: How many times a week do you eat:

a. Red meat such as beef, lamb, veal

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Never | 15 | 14 | 16 |
| 1 to 2 | 51 | 48 | 55 |
| 3 to 4 | 23 | 25 | 20 |
| 5 to 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| 7 or more | 6 | 8 | 3 |
| Don't Know/Refused | <1 | 0 | 1 |

b. Chicken or Turkey

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Never | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| 1 to 2 | 43 | 43 | 44 |
| 3 to 4 | 38 | 37 | 38 |
| 5 to 6 | 8 | 8 | 7 |
| 7 or more | 8 | 10 | 5 |
| Don't Know/Refused | <1 | 0 | 1 |

c. Pork

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Never | 31 | 31 | 32 |
| 1 to 2 | 58 | 59 | 58 |
| 3 to 4 | 8 | 9 | 7 |
| 5 to 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 7 or more | <1 | 1 | <1 |
| Don't Know/Refused | 1 | <1 | 2 |

Question 4: (continued) How many times a week do you eat:

d. Fish

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Never | 31 | 36 | 25 |
| 1 to 2 | 56 | 51 | 62 |
| 3 to 4 | 9 | 9 | 10 |
| 5 to 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 7 or more | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Don't Know/Refused | 1 | 1 | 1 |

e. Processed meats such as lunch meats, hot dogs, bacon

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Never | 24 | 21% | 28 |
| 1 to 2 | 52 | 54 | 50 |
| 3 to 4 | 15 | 16 | 14 |
| 5 to 6 | 3 | 4 | 2 |
| 7 or more | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| Don't Know/Refused | 1% | <1 | 1 |

Question 5: On average, how much of the following do you drink each day?

a. Water

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| None | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| One glass (8 ounces) or less | 7 | 6 | 8 |
| 2 to 4 glasses | 45 | 43 | 49 |
| 5 glasses or more | 47 | 51 | 43 |
| Don't Know/Refused | 0 | 0 | 0 |

b. Alcohol (18+)

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| None | 55 | 51 | 61 |
| One drink or less | 35 | 38 | 31 |
| 2 to 4 drinks | 8 | 9 | 8 |
| 5 or more drinks | <1 | 1 | <1 |
| Don't Know/Refused | 1 | 1 | 1 |

Question 5: (continued) On average, how much of the following do you drink each day?

b. Alcohol (21+)

| | Total (n=980) % | 21-49 (n=330) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| None | 54 | 48 | 61 |
| One drink or less | 36 | 40 | 31 |
| 2 to 4 drinks | 9 | 10 | 8 |
| 5 or more drinks | 1 | 1 | <1 |
| Don't Know/Refused | 1 | 1 | 1 |

c. Coffee

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| None | 35 | 40% | 28 |
| 1 cup (6 ounces) or less | 28 | 33 | 23 |
| 2 to 4 cups | 31 | 23 | 42 |
| 5 cups or more | 6 | 5 | 7 |
| Don't Know/Refused | 0 | 0 | 0 |

d. Regular soft drinks such as soda, lemonade, tea

| | Total (n=1012) % | 18-49 (n=361) % | 50+ (n=650) % |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| None | 23 | 19 | 28 |
| One glass (8 ounces) or less | 45 | 45 | 45 |
| 2 to 4 glasses | 25 | 28 | 22% |
| 5 glasses or more | 7 | 8 | 6 |
| Don't Know/Refused | <1 | <1 | <1 |