

TRACKING NUTRITION TRENDS VII

Highlights from the Canadian Council of Food and Nutrition Survey of Food and Nutrition Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviours of Canadians in 2008

Brought to you by the team of Registered Dietitians at *Kellogg's* Canada Inc.



LORETTA DiFRANCESCO, PhD, RD, MBA

Dr. Loretta DiFrancesco is Principal of *Source! Nutrition*®, a consulting business in scientific and regulatory affairs in food and nutrition. Prior to establishing this business, she held various food industry positions in nutrition research, product development and scientific and regulatory affairs in the United States and Canada. She earned her PhD in nutrition from the University of Guelph and MBA from New York University. Through her professional memberships and experience, she has chaired the FCPC Scientific and Regulatory Affairs Council and the CFDR Scientific Review Committee. She has also served on the CCFN Advisory Committee for the 2006 and 2008 Tracking Nutrition Trends surveys.

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Introduction

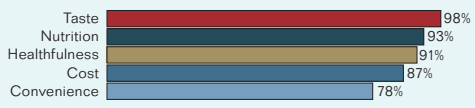
Tracking Nutrition Trends (TNT) is a nationwide survey of self-reported food and nutrition knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of adult Canadians. First established in 1989, it has been conducted six times in previous years to track these measures over time. TNT VII is the 2008 edition, which for the first time used an online survey methodology compared with personal and telephone interviews of the past surveys. This change has created a mode effect such that 2008 results cannot be directly compared with results from previous years. The purpose of this article is to provide highlights from TNT VII as a snapshot in 2008 of the food and nutrition knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of Canadians and of how these factors impact the food choices

and dietary habits of Canadians. This information can be used to help inform food and nutrition policies, public health nutrition education materials, nutrition research and food product development and communications.

For further details on the survey methodology and all results, a copy of the TNT VII report can be purchased from the Canadian Council of Food and Nutrition at www.ccfn.ca

Food and Nutrition Attitudes and Impacts on Food Choice

The TNT VII survey assessed food and nutrition attitudes of Canadians with questions on perceptions about "healthy" foods and factors influencing food selection. Perceptions about "healthy" foods are driven by food content, equally for the presence of "positive" nutrients (39%) and the lower content or absence of "negative" nutrients (44% combined). Key factors in food selection include taste, nutrition, healthfulness, cost and convenience, with taste being the top ranked factor.



Responses for "somewhat" and "very" important combined
Base: Total Canadians (n=2003)

Canadians who identify nutrition as an important factor were further probed to assess the frequency with which they base their food selection on the specific nutrient content of a food. When provided with a list of 14 nutrients,

whole grains and fibre topped the list of responses for this subgroup. This result was the same for food label readers ("always" or "usually") and non-label readers ("never" or "first time only"); however, label readers more often select foods based on nutrient content consistently across all nutrients, even though both label readers and non-label readers were from the subgroup identifying nutrition as important.

	Total (%)	Label Readers (%)	Non-label Readers (%)
Whole grains	82	90	67
Fibre	81	90	65
Protein	76	84	63
Total fat	75	84	62
Calories	74	84	63
Sugar	73	81	65
Vitamins	72	78	64
Saturated fat	71	80	57
Salt/sodium	70	78	54
Trans fatty acids	69	77	58
Calcium	68	75	55
Cholesterol	66	73	53
Carbohydrate	65	75	55
Iron	58	65	54

For additional insight on the impacts of food and nutrition attitudes on food choice, Canadians were further probed on the degree of influence of various food-related factors. Combining results for “somewhat” or “very” influential, the top four influencers are low trans fat (80%), made with whole grains (78%), low sugar (72%) and low salt or sodium (71%), all of which pertain to the nutrient content of a food. In contrast, the least influential factors reflect other food characteristics, namely, whether a food is organically grown (41%), has a low glycemic index (39%), contains probiotics (35%) or is produced using

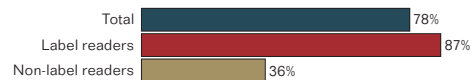
biotechnology (20%). To help determine the reason certain food-related factors are not influential, further analysis was done on the responses for “not too much” or “not at all” influenced for each food factor. Generally, Canadians who are not influenced by a particular food factor indicate they do not care about the factor (64-82%, depending on the factor). However, for foods produced using biotechnology, containing probiotics or having a low glycemic index, almost one-third of the Canadians who do not find these factors influential indicate the reason is they are unaware of the benefits.

Knowledge and Understanding of Nutrition

The TNT VII survey examined self-reported nutrition knowledge and understanding in specific nutrition topic areas. Most Canadians consider themselves “very” or “somewhat” knowledgeable about nutrition, with meal planners and food label readers rating themselves higher compared with non-meal planners and non-label readers, respectively. These findings suggest that Canadians involved in activities related to food and nutrition are more confident about their nutrition knowledge.



Responses for “very” and “somewhat” knowledgeable combined
Base: Total Canadians (n=2003); meal planners (n=1705); non-meal planners (n=292)



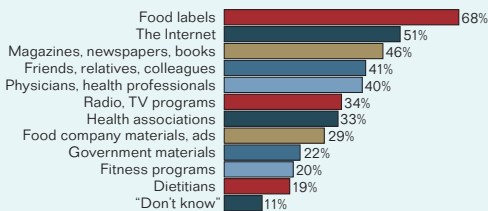
Responses for “very” and “somewhat” knowledgeable combined
Base: Total Canadians (n=2003); label readers (“usually” or “always”) (n=1163); non-label readers (“never”) (n=81) *caution small base

Results on self-reported nutrition knowledge are limited because they are not direct measures of understanding. For further insight, the TNT VII survey thus included several statements on specific nutrition topics and Canadians were probed on their agreement with the statements. Here are some selected findings:

<p>Canadians have a solid understanding of dietary fibre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 78% agree a diet high in fibre may help prevent colon cancer • 74% agree some types of dietary fibre can help reduce blood cholesterol levels
<p>Understanding of the Glycemic Index (GI) is moderate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 51% agree the GI ranks carbohydrate foods by their effect on blood glucose levels • Higher agreement (75%) in Canadians with higher self-reported nutrition knowledge
<p>Understanding of cholesterol is mixed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80% understand reducing dietary fat can lower blood cholesterol levels • 63% mistakenly believe dietary cholesterol is the major factor affecting blood cholesterol levels
<p>Understanding of omega-3 fatty acids is substantial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75% agree omega-3 fatty acids are essential to a healthy diet • Slightly higher in meal planners (76% vs. 70%) and food label readers (82% vs. 71%)

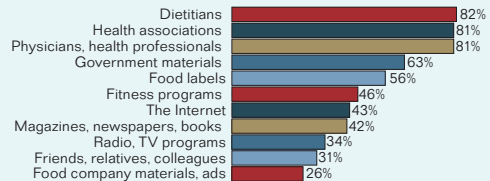
Sources of Food and Nutrition Information

The TNT VII survey also examined sources of food and nutrition information used by Canadians. Food labels are the top used source of information, followed by the Internet and magazines, newspapers or books. All of these most popular sources of information are also easy to access.



Sources used in the past 12 months (multiple response)
Base: Total Canadians (n=2003)

Dietitians top the list of sources of food and nutrition information considered to be the most credible by Canadians, followed closely by health associations and family physicians or other healthcare professionals. Interestingly, the sources of food and nutrition information considered to be the most credible are not the most used sources. This finding likely reflects that the more credible sources are not always the most accessible.



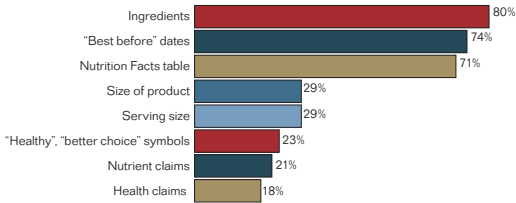
Responses rated 4 or 5 on 5-point scale (5 is “extremely credible”)
Base: Total Canadians (n=2003)

Focus on Food Labels

The TNT VII survey included several questions on the experience of Canadians in using food labels. The 2008 findings are of particular interest because they are the first measures after the December 2007 deadline for mandatory nutrition labelling for all food manufacturers (including small scale manufacturers).

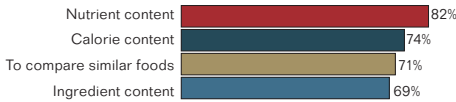
When probed on the frequency of reading food labels, over half (57%) of Canadians read labels regularly (“usually” or “always” combined) and of those who read labels at least once (all responses combined except “never” and “don’t know”), 95% are able to find the information they need.

With regard to the type of information Canadians seek on food labels, the ingredient listing and Nutrition Facts table are among the top three responses for label readers. These results reflect information related to food content, similar to results on factors related to food content that influence food choice. Most label readers also seek information on “best before” dates, perhaps as influenced by any concurrent media reports and other public information on food safety.



Which of the following do you look for? (multiple response)
 Base: Food label readers (all responses combined except "never" and "don't know") (n=1907)

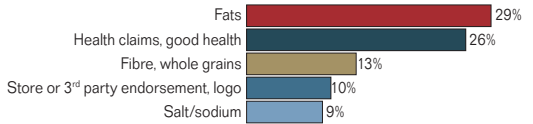
In terms of how Canadians use the information on food labels, results also cluster around food content, with most label readers using the information to determine the nutrient, calorie or ingredient content of a food. Label readers also use the information to compare similar foods, which is encouraging because this use is one of the intended uses of mandatory nutrition labelling.



Selected presentation of top four uses only
 Responses for "often" and "sometimes" used combined
 Base: Food label readers (all responses combined except "never" and "don't know") (n=1907)

Results are less encouraging with respect to the recall of food label claims and statements about the nutrition or health benefits of a product. Overall, 21% of Canadians recall food label claims and statements over a past 12-month period, with label readers faring somewhat better than non-label readers (27% vs. 20%, respectively). A possible explanation for this low rate of recall is that items such as nutrient and health claims rank lower on the list of information Canadians seek on food labels relative to food content-related information such as the ingredient listing and Nutrition Facts table.

Canadians who recall food label claims and statements were further probed to determine the nature of the claims and statements recalled (open-ended). Results in this subgroup show that positive statements such as health claims and those associated with good health rank second next to statements about fat. Statements about fibre and whole grains are also at the top of the list, ranking third. These findings on the nature of claims and statements recalled are generally consistent with the findings on factors influencing food choice, namely, trans fat, whole grains, sugar and salt or sodium.



Selected presentation of top five recalls
 Base: If "yes" to recalling claims (n=434)

Eating Habits

The third arm of the TNT VII survey examined self-reported eating habits of Canadians to determine if behaviours are consistent with their knowledge and attitudes.

Breakfast and lunch are eaten daily by almost two-thirds of Canadians and dinner is eaten daily by almost all Canadians. Alternatively, an analysis of the responses to see how often meals are skipped shows that 12% of Canadians report eating breakfast less than once per week or never compared with 5% reporting these responses for lunch; and dinner is almost never skipped. These findings on meal skipping are concerning, given that breakfast is widely accepted as the most important meal of the day.

	Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner
Daily	58%	62%	87%
4 or more times per week	13%	18%	9%
2-3 times per week	12%	12%	3%
Once a week	5%	2%	*
Less than once a week	6%	3%	*
Never	6%	2%	0%

*Less than 0.5%
 Base: Total Canadians (n=2003)

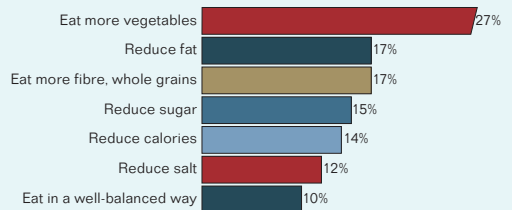
In addition to the traditional "three meals a day," snacking contributes to the daily food consumption of Canadians, with 67% reporting to eat one or two snacks per day.

Another key aspect in assessing eating habits is whether meals and snacks are home-prepared or eaten out-of-home, including eating at any type of foodservice establishment and ordering take-out food. In contrast to the results on skipped meals, breakfast is the meal most likely to be prepared at home every day by Canadians (52%), followed by lunch (43%) and dinner (38%). A perceived lack of convenience (home-prepared) at a time of day that is typically rushed might explain the finding that breakfast is the meal most often skipped.

With regard to out-of-home eating habits, most Canadians eat at a foodservice establishment (48-74%) or use take-out (20-67%) one or fewer times per week, with a higher frequency of a least twice per week reported by men and youth (<25 years). Lunch (62%) and dinner (74%) are the most popular meals eaten out-of-home and this finding could reflect lifestyle influences such as working during the day and participating in leisure, social or other activities in the evening.

New in 2008, the TNT VII examined eating while engaged in another activity due to the recent interest in "mindless eating," which could result in less focus on food intake and hunger signals and contribute to obesity. Most Canadians (77%) eat while engaged in another activity such as working, watching television or driving at least once per day.

Further insight on eating habits can also be obtained by examining recent changes. Many Canadians (59%) report having made changes to their eating habits over a past 12-month period; and in particular, women (63%) and people who are on a diet (82%) are more likely to have made a change. The top reported types of changes (open-ended) reflect positive eating behaviours such as eating more vegetables and fibre and whole grains. These findings are encouraging and suggest that one way Canadians are engaging in a healthy lifestyle is by adopting healthier eating habits.



Selected presentation of top seven changes
 Base: If "yes" to making a change over the past 12 months (n=1211)

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What Have We Learned?

The 2008 Tracking Nutrition Trends VII survey provided useful food and nutrition information on the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of 2003 adult Canadians.

Below are some key take-away points that dietitians may find helpful to their practice.

- Taste remains the most important factor in food selection, followed closely by nutrition and healthfulness.
- For Canadians who identify nutrition as important, whole grains and fibre are the top two responses when they consider their food choices based on the specific nutrient content of a food.
- Dietitians and other health care professionals and health associations are considered to be the most credible source of food and nutrition information by Canadians. Food labels are seen as more credible than other sources such as the Internet, magazines, newspapers, books, radio and TV programs and friends and relatives.
- The top three types of information Canadians seek on food labels are the ingredient listing, "best before" dates and Nutrition Facts table.
- Despite the fact that breakfast is widely accepted as the most important meal of the day, 58% of Canadians surveyed eat breakfast daily. This is an opportunity for dietitians to encourage a daily consumption of breakfast. Here are few facts about breakfast: people who consume breakfast are more likely to have a healthier body weight, meet their recommended daily nutrient intakes particularly for vitamins and minerals, perform well in cognitive tasks in the morning when the brain needs fuel and engage in healthy lifestyle behaviours overall.