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## Why Americans Eat What They Do: Taste, Nutrition, Cost, Convenience, and Weight Control Concerns as Influences on Food Consumption

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### Abstract

**Objective** To examine the self-reported importance of taste, nutrition, cost, convenience, and weight control on personal dietary choices and whether these factors vary across demographic groups, are associated with lifestyle choices related to health (termed health lifestyle), and actually predict eating behavior.

**Design** Data are based on responses to 2 self-administered cross-sectional surveys. The main outcomes measured were consumption of fruits and vegetables, fast foods, cheese, and breakfast cereals, which were determined on the basis of responses to questions about usual and recent consumption and a food diary.

**Subjects/setting** Respondents were a national sample of 2,967 adults. Response rates were 71% to the first survey and 77% to the second survey (which was sent to people who completed the first survey).

**Statistical analyses** Univariate analyses were used to describe importance ratings, bivariate analyses (correlations and *t* tests) were used to examine demographic and lifestyle differences on importance measures, and multivariate analyses (general linear models) were used to predict lifestyle cluster membership and food consumption.

**Results** Respondents reported that taste is the most important influence on their food choices, followed by cost. Demographic and health lifestyle differences were evident across all 5 importance measures. The importance of nutrition and the importance of weight control were predicted best by subject's membership in a particular health lifestyle cluster. When eating behaviors were examined, demographic measures and membership in a health lifestyle cluster predicted consumption of fruits and vegetables, fast foods, cheese, and breakfast cereal. The importance placed on taste, nutrition, cost, convenience, and weight control also predicted types of foods consumed.

**Applications** Our results suggest that nutritional concerns, per se, are of less relevance to most people than taste and cost. One implication is that nutrition education programs should attempt to design and promote nutritious diets as being tasty and inexpensive. *J Am Diet Assoc.* 1998;98:1118-1126.



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