

Many U.S. Adults Use the USDA's Food Pyramid and Food Labeling to Eat Healthier

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food Pyramid and manufacturers' food labels are intended to help adults follow a healthier and more nutritious diet. The latest Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Poll confirms that many people make use of these information sources. In fact, two out of five (40%) adults say they have changed their eating habits to conform to the USDA's Food Pyramid and half (51%) always or very often refer to food labels when making food choices for themselves or their families. These adults are most likely to cite eating a balanced, nutritional diet as their main reason for utilizing food label information.

These are some of the results of an online survey of 2,706 U.S. adults, ages 18 and older, conducted by Harris Interactive between September 15 and 19, 2006 for The Wall Street Journal Online (www.wsj.com/health).

Most adults (95%) have read food labels at some point when making food choices for themselves or their family in order to learn nutritional information about a product. Of adults who read food labels, 39 percent say their most important reason for doing so is to eat a balanced, nutritious diet, compared to managing a medical condition (such as diabetes, high cholesterol or blood pressure) (23%), and losing weight (19%). Adults whose most important reason for reading food labels is to manage a medical condition are slightly more likely than the others to always or very often read the labels (63% vs. for a nutritious diet 58%; to lose weight 52%).

When making food choices for themselves, adults who read food labels are most likely to look for information regarding fat (83%), calorie (76%) and sugar content (72%). Apart from organic information (26%), fiber content was least cited, though still looked at by a majority (56%).

When making food choices for a child, parents are most likely to focus on sugar content (82%), nutritional value (80%) and fat content (73%). Interestingly, one-third (34%) of parents say they look for organic content information when choosing food for a child.

Of the adults who say they have altered their diets to conform to the USDA's Food Pyramid guidelines, 22 percent say they have done so with regard to daily recommended food group servings and 19 percent say they have done so with regard to portion size.

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TABLE 1

Altering One's Diet to Conform with the Food Pyramid's Guidelines

"Have you ever altered your diet to conform to the recommendations of the Food Pyramid, which is published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to help consumers follow a healthy and nutritious diet? Please select all that apply."

Base: All adults

	All Adults	Parents*	Those Who Read Food Labels (by most important reason)		
			To Lose Weight	For Nutritious Diet	To Manage Medical Condition
			%	%	%
Altered Diet (Net)	40	40	46	49	47
Yes, with regard to food group servings per day	22	22	22	30	23
Yes, with regard to portion size	19	19	28	24	18
Yes, for another reason	15	17	14	15	26
No, I have not	60	60	54	51	53

Note: Multiple-response question.

*Have at least one child age 18 or younger.

TABLE 2

Reading Food Labels to Make Choices

"When you make food choices for you or your family, how often do you read the food labels that provide nutritional information about the product?"

Base: All adults

	All Adults	Parents*	Those Who Read Food Labels (by most important reason)		
			To Lose Weight	For Nutritious Diet	To Manage Medical Condition
			%	%	%
Ever Read Food Labels	95	95	100	100	100
Always/Very Often (Net)	51	45	52	58	63
Always	17	16	17	19	22
Very often	34	29	35	39	40
Sometimes/Hardly Ever (Net)	44	50	48	42	37
Sometimes	32	38	40	34	27
Hardly ever	12	12	8	8	10
Never	5	5	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

*Have at least one child age 18 or younger.

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TABLE 3
Reasons for Reading Food Labels

“People read food labels for different reasons. Which one of these is most important to you?”

Base: Read food labels

	All Adults	Parents*
	%	%
To eat a balanced, nutritional diet	39	44
To manage a medical condition such as diabetes, high cholesterol or blood pressure	23	18
To lose weight	19	22
Some other reason	18	16

Note: Percentages may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.

*Have at least one child age 18 or younger.

TABLE 4
Types of Information Adults Seek When Making Personal Food Choices

Summary of Yes, I Consider It

“When choosing a food product for yourself, what types of information do you look for on a food label?”

Base: Read food labels

	All Adults	Parents*	Those who Read Food Labels (by most important reason)		
			To Lose Weight	For Nutritious Diet	To Manage Condition
			%	%	%
Fat	83	84	92	89	85
Calories	76	77	93	84	73
Sugar	72	73	74	77	79
Nutritional value	69	66	64	82	64
Sodium (salt)	68	68	61	73	77
Carbohydrates	60	61	72	63	62
Fiber	56	55	61	65	55
Organic	26	27	20	37	19

*Have at least one child age 18 or younger.

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TABLE 5
Types of Information Parents Seek When Making Food Choices for Children

Summary of Yes, I Consider It

"When choosing a food product for a child, what types of information do you look for on a food label?"

Base: Parents who read food labels

	Parents*	Those who Read Food Labels (by most important reason)		
		To Lose Weight	For Nutritious Diet	To Manage Condition
	%	%	%	%
Sugar	82	79	88	85
Nutritional value	80	81	90	75
Fat	73	75	81	71
Sodium (salt)	66	62	72	67
Calories	64	67	70	65
Fiber	55	57	65	48
Carbohydrates	54	60	51	63
Organic	34	26	42	31

*Have at least one child age 18 or younger.

Downloadable PDFs of Wall Street Journal Online/Harris Interactive Health-Care Polls are posted at http://www.harrisinteractive.com/news/newsletters_wsj.asp.

Methodology

Harris Interactive conducted this online survey within the United States between September 15 and 19, 2006 among a national cross section of 2,706 adults, ages 18 years and over. Figures for age, gender, race/ethnicity, education, income and region were weighted where necessary to align with population proportions. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All surveys are subject to several sources of error. These include: sampling error (because only a sample of a population is interviewed); measurement error due to question wording and/or question order, deliberately or unintentionally inaccurate responses, nonresponse (including refusals), interviewer effects (when live interviewers are used) and weighting.

With one exception (sampling error) the magnitude of the errors that result cannot be estimated. There is, therefore, no way to calculate a finite "margin of error" for any survey and the use of these words should be avoided.

With pure probability samples, with 100 percent response rates, it is possible to calculate the probability that the sampling error (but not other sources of error) is not greater than some number. With pure probability samples of 2,706, one could

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say with a ninety-five percent probability that the results have a sampling error of +/- 3 percentage points. Sampling error for data based on subsamples would be higher and would vary. However that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

About The Wall Street Journal Online

The Wall Street Journal Online at WSJ.com, published by Dow Jones & Company (NYSE: DJ; www.dowjones.com), is the largest paid subscription news site on the Web. Launched in 1996, the Online Journal continues to attract quality subscribers that are at the top of their industries, with 766,000 subscribers world-wide as of Q2, 2006.

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In 2005, the Online Journal was awarded a Codie Award for Best Online News Service for the second consecutive year, and its Health Industry Edition was awarded Best Online Science or Technology Service for the third consecutive year. In 2004, the Online Journal received an Eppy Award for Best Internet Business Service over 1 million monthly visitors. The Wall Street Journal Online network includes CareerJournal.com, OpinionJournal.com, StartupJournal.com, RealEstateJournal.com and CollegeJournal.com.



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About Harris Interactive

Harris Interactive is the 12th largest and fastest-growing market research firm in the world. The company provides research-driven insights and strategic advice to help its clients make more confident decisions which lead to measurable and enduring improvements in performance. Harris Interactive is widely known for *The Harris Poll*, one of the longest running, independent opinion polls and for pioneering online market research methods. The company has built what could conceivably be the world's largest panel of survey respondents, the Harris Poll Online. Harris Interactive serves clients worldwide through its United States, Europe and Asia offices, its wholly-owned subsidiary Novatris in France and through a global network of independent market research firms. The service bureau, HISB, provides its market research industry clients with mixed-mode data collection, panel development services as well as syndicated and tracking research consultation. More information about Harris Interactive may be obtained at www.harrisinteractive.com.

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