

# Time spent preparing meals at home linked to healthier diet

31 October 2014, by Valerie Debenedette



Time may be one of the most essential ingredients for a healthy diet, finds new research in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

Spending more [time](#) at home preparing [meals](#) is associated with several indicators of a better diet, such as eating more fruits and vegetables. Conversely, spending less than an hour a day preparing [food](#) at home is associated with eating more [fast food](#) and spending more money eating out.

"There is very little data on the time cost of healthy eating," said Pablo Monsivais, Ph.D., M.P.H., the study's lead author and a senior university lecturer with the Center for Diet and Activity Research at the University of Cambridge School of Clinical Medicine in England.

The findings are based on responses from 1,319 adults who participated by phone in the Seattle Obesity Study in 2008 and 2009. Participants answered questions about how many hours a day they averaged preparing and cooking food and cleaning up after meals. They also reported on food consumption and spending, as well as use of

restaurants. About 16 percent of participants said they spent less than one hour a day on meal preparation. About 43 percent reported spending between one and two hours per day on meal preparation, while 41 percent said they spent more than two hours a day on it.

Employment outside the home was associated with fewer hours spent preparing meals. Notably, about two-thirds of those who reported that they prepped, cooked and cleaned up were women. People with less time available for meal preparation also appear to value convenience, choosing more often to eat out or to buy fast food and ready-made foods to eat at home.

"This study reinforces what previous studies and nutrition practice tells us: that time is commonly reported as a barrier to [healthy eating](#)," said Lauri Wright, Ph.D., R.D.N., a registered dietician and nutritionist and assistant professor in the Department of Community and Family Health at the University of South Florida in Tampa.

Wright, a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, reiterated an observation made in the study: "Besides time and cost, people often don't feel confident about their ability to prepare healthy meals."

Wright added, "Registered dietician/nutritionists give close consideration to the issue of time when making their recommendations. They can give tips on ways to optimize time and money, such as planning meals, shopping ahead and preparing some foods in advance that can allow families to have quick-to-prepare healthy meals and snacks."

**More information:** Monsivais P, Anju Aggarwal A, Drewnowski A. "Time spent on home food preparation and indicators of healthy eating." *Am J Prev Med*. DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2014.07.033](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2014.07.033)

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