



A Look at Food Skills in Canada



INTRODUCTION

A healthy diet plays an important role in achieving and maintaining a healthy body weight, as well as in reducing the risk of obesity and chronic disease. Having adequate food skills impacts food choice and eating behaviours, which contribute to healthy eating.¹ Food skills encourage healthy eating by providing individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills to plan, purchase and prepare foods and healthy meals.

What are Food Skills?

“At an individual and household level, food skills are complex, interrelated, person-centered set of skills that are necessary to provide and prepare safe, nutritious, and culturally-acceptable meals for all members of one’s household.”²

Several studies suggest that food preparation and cooking skills are declining globally.¹ Over the past several decades, in Canada, there has been an increase in processed, pre-prepared and convenience foods being purchased and assembled rather than meals being prepared using whole, basic ingredients.³ This increase can negatively affect the overall diet quality of Canadians.⁴ As such, there is growing interest in measuring food skills in Canada, particularly since data on food skills has never been collected at the national level.

METHODOLOGY

Health Canada’s Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion sponsored the addition of two food skills modules (questionnaires) on [Statistics Canada’s Canadian Community Health Survey – Annual Component \(CCHS\)](#). Both modules were developed jointly by Health Canada and Statistics Canada.^{5,6}

The data for each module was collected over a two month period amongst a representative sample of the Canadian household population aged 12 years or older across the ten provinces. Excluded from the sample were persons living in the three territories, on reserves, in remote regions, full-time members of the Canadian Forces and institutionalized populations. Share file data was used to analyse the results presented below. Share files include all the respondents who agreed to share their data with provincial and territorial health departments, Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

Food Skills Modules Description

Module 1

- Focus: **planning, transference of skills to children and knowledge**
- Data collected between November and December 2012 (n=9 559)

Module 2

- Focus: **mechanical cooking skills and food conceptualisation**
- Data collected between January and February 2013 (n=10 156)

RESULTS: MODULE 1

1. Planning

Many Canadians reported meal planning activities before going grocery shopping:

- 74% reported writing a grocery list.
- 62% reported planning their meals before going to the store.

Canadians who reported writing a grocery list were more likely to consume five or more vegetables and fruit per day compared to those who do not.

Who Reported Meal Planning Activities?

Writing a Grocery List	Planning Meals
<p>78% of women 70% of men</p>	<p>Canadians aged 50 and younger are more likely than those aged over 50</p>
<p>77% of non-immigrants 66% of Immigrants</p>	<p>68% of Canadians with children living in the household* 59% of Canadians without children living in the household</p>
<p>77% of Canadians with post-secondary education 68% of Canadians with secondary education 69% of Canadians with less than secondary school education</p>	<p>66% of Canadians with post-secondary education 59% of Canadians with secondary education 45% of Canadians with less than secondary education</p>
<p>76% of Canadians living in a higher income household 70% of Canadians living in a lower income household</p>	<p>65% of Canadians living in a higher income household 58% of Canadians living in a lower income household</p>

* Canadian adult with children aged 18 years and younger living in the household

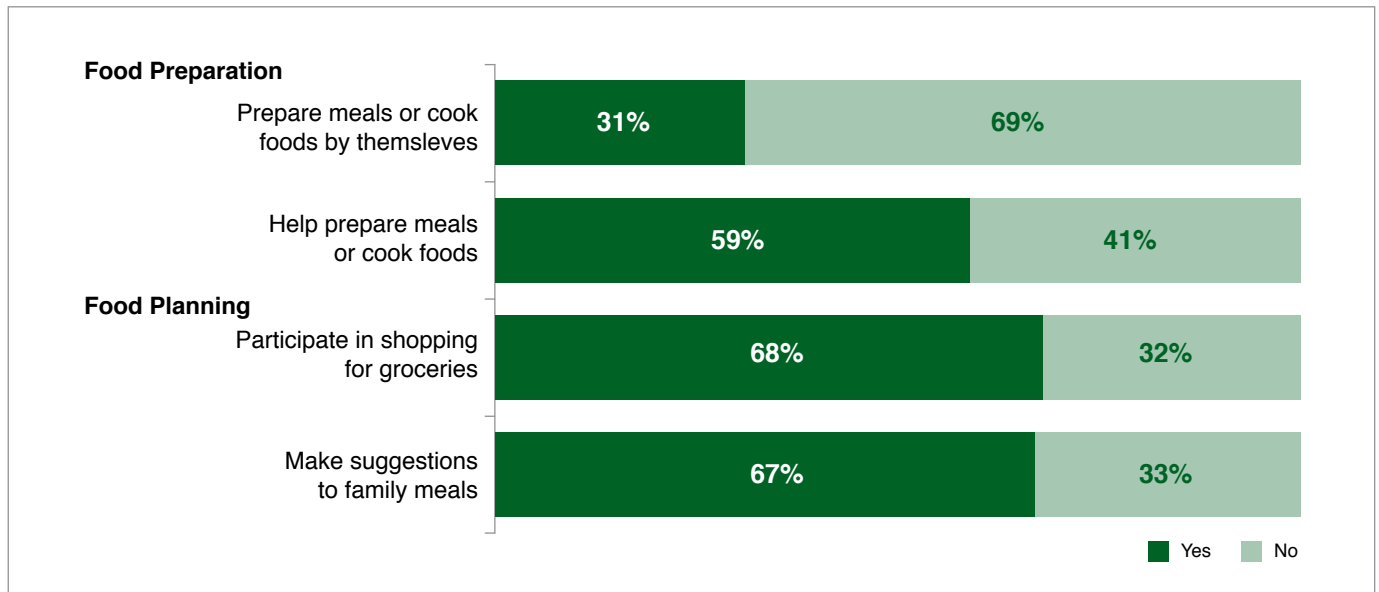


2. Transference of Skills

Children and adolescents' exposure to cooking and food preparation activities has decreased within the home and school environments.⁷ There is evidence supporting the association between preparing food and the food choices of children and adolescents. For instance, Larston *et al.* have shown that adolescents

who reported preparing foods more frequently also reported healthier food choices; which were associated with lower intakes of fat and higher intakes of vegetables and fruit, fibre, folate and vitamin A.⁸

Proportion of Households where Children are Involved in Food Preparation and Planning Activities



In Canada, children's involvement in food preparation and food planning activities varied according to the activity and the population subgroup.

- Households with one adult and households with less than secondary school education were more likely to report that children make suggestions for family meals than households with more than one adult or households with higher levels of education.



3. Knowledge

Food skills knowledge includes knowledge of overall healthy eating, food safety and label reading.² This module explored more specifically Canadians' knowledge of nutrition labels.

- 65% of Canadians reported selecting foods based on nutrition labels when shopping for groceries.

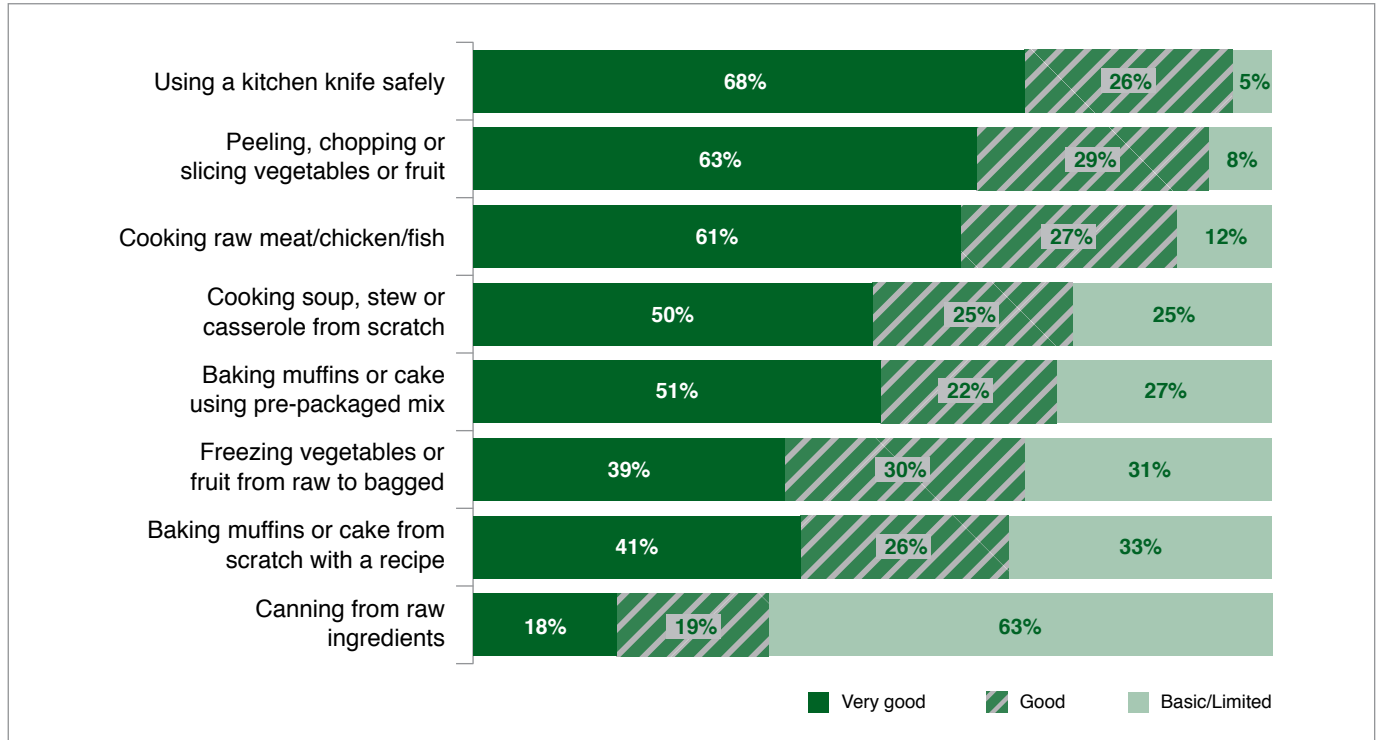
Canadians who reported selecting foods based on nutrition labels were more likely to consume five or more vegetables and fruit per day compared to those who do not.

RESULTS: MODULE 2

1. Mechanical Cooking Skills

The proportion of Canadians reporting very good mechanical skills differed across food preparation activities.

Canadians' Self Reported Mechanical Skill Level by Food Preparation Activity (%)



- Compared to those with basic or limited mechanical skills, those who reported having very good skills were more likely to also report:
 - Higher frequency of vegetables and fruit consumption.
 - Better self-perceived eating habits.
 - Higher levels of perceived health.
- The most common barriers identified among those who do not prepare or do not help prepare meals included lack of time, insufficient skills and “not my responsibility”

Men vs. Women

- Men were less likely to report that they prepare most meals in the household (19%) compared to women (64%).
- Women were more likely than men to report the highest levels of mechanical skills across all food preparation activities.
- Among the mechanical skills selected by men, here are those for which they more frequently reported being very good at:
 - Cooking raw meat/ chicken or fish
 - Peeling, chopping or slicing vegetable or fruit
 - Handling a kitchen knife safely

2. Food Conceptualisation

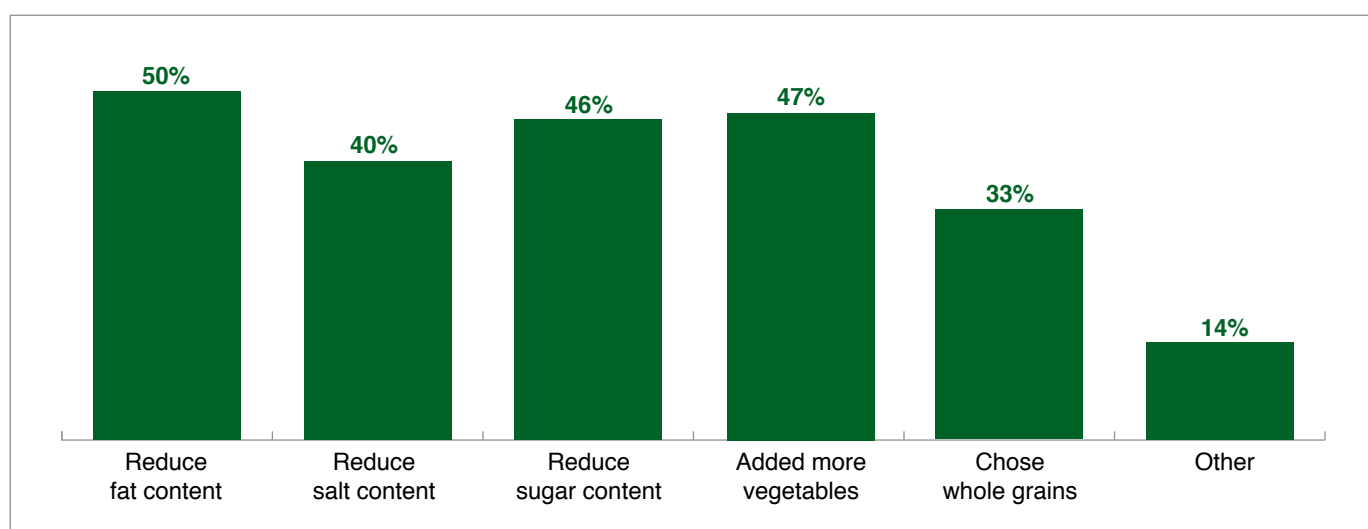
Sixty three percent of Canadians reported having ever adjusted a recipe to make it healthier. Canadians in the following sub-population groups were more likely to have ever adjusted a recipe to make it healthier:

- Women,
- Higher education,
- Higher income,

- Those who reported eating five or more vegetables and fruit per day,
- Higher perceived health status,
- Better perceived eating habits, and
- Higher perceived ability to cook.

The most common adjustments Canadians made to recipes included reductions in fat, reductions in sugar and adding more vegetables.

Common Adjustments (% of Canadians) to make Recipes Healthier



CONCLUSION

The results identified gender differences across food skills categories. They also identified common characteristics among those who reported higher vegetables and fruit consumption.

Gender differences are apparent among planning, mechanical and food conceptualisation skills; where women consistently reported greater skill levels. Men were less likely to prepare most meals in the household (19%) compared to women (64%).

Higher frequency of vegetable and fruit

consumption was more likely among Canadians who reported selecting foods based on nutrition labels as well as those who reported higher levels of food skills; in particular greater planning, mechanical and food conceptualisation skills. This may explain, in part, how food skills positively impact food choice and eating behaviours of Canadians.

These results serve as a baseline measure of food skills in Canada. They can also be used to inform public health nutrition policies and the development of targeted food skills interventions.

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