

What Do Canadians Think about Nutrition?

There are a variety of data sources available that provide insights into nutrition-related knowledge, attitudes and eating behaviours of Canadians. The National Institute of Nutrition (NIN), in partnership with Health Canada and a number of other partner organizations, has conducted the *Tracking Nutrition Trends* series of surveys to investigate the knowledge, attitudes and reported behaviour of adult Canadians with respect to nutrition. The survey was conducted in 1989, 1994, 1997 and 2001 with the findings presented here representing the 2001 phase. In 2000, NIN also conducted consumer research with adult Canadians regarding beliefs about functional foods. The data collected provide perspectives on what Canadians think about nutrition, and the role of nutrition in health.

Importance of Nutrition

In 2001, almost nine in ten (88%) of Canadians said nutrition is an important (“extremely”, “very” or “quite” important) consideration for choosing the food they eat. More than half, (53%) said nutrition is “extremely” or “very” important to them when choosing food. More than one-third (35%) reported that they consider nutrition “quite” important, while 12% said they think it is only “slightly” important or “not at all” important.

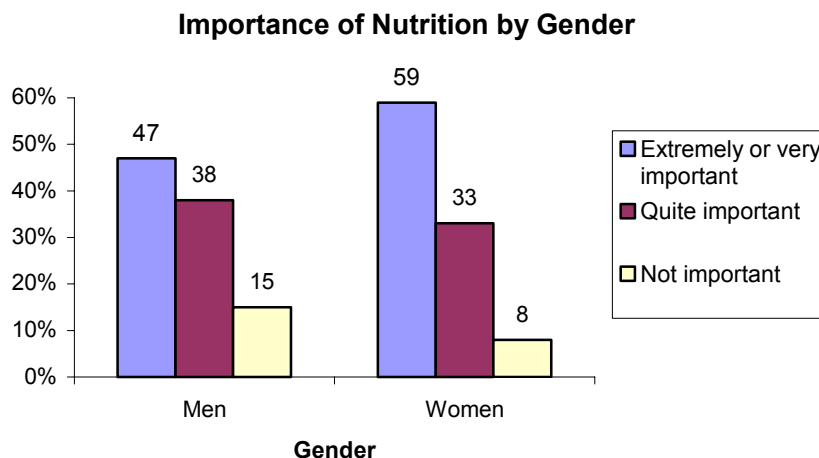
Importance of Nutrition By Age

When choosing the foods they will eat, 44% of Canadians aged 18–34 reported that they believe

nutrition is “very” or “extremely” important. Older Canadians place more emphasis on nutrition, as 55% of those between 35 and 54 and 62% of those over 55 said that they feel nutrition is “very” or “extremely” important.

Importance of Nutrition By Gender

Overall, more women than men think nutrition is an important factor in choosing food. More than half (59%) of women and close to half of men (47%) reported that they consider nutrition as “very” or “extremely” important when choosing the food they eat.



Source: National Institute of Nutrition, 2002

What Canadians Believe About Nutrition and Health

According to NIN's consumer research on functional foods, 80% of all Canadian adults reported that they believe that food and nutrition play a "great" role in maintaining and improving overall health. In addition, 93% of adult Canadians said that they believe that certain foods have health benefits beyond basic nutrition, including enhancing health and reducing the risk of disease. Two-thirds (66%) reported that they or a family member consume at least one food or food component (such as fibre or vitamins) because of the health benefits they believe it provides. Three-quarters (77%) of Canadians could name at least one food or food component they believe has health-promoting properties. The foods that Canadians cited as having health-promoting properties include broccoli (14%), milk (14%), vitamin C (10%), oranges/orange juice (10%), fish/fish oil (10%), leafy green vegetables (10%), fibre (10%) and garlic (9%). Most Canadians (89%) agreed that reducing fat in their diet can lower cholesterol and three-quarters (77%) said that they believe that a high-fibre diet may help prevent colon cancer.

Similarly, according to the 2001 phase of Tracking Nutrition Trends, nine in ten consumers (90% overall; 95% of women and 86% of men) have heard about the importance of calcium and vitamin D for reducing the risk for developing osteoporosis. 86% of all Canadian adults surveyed recalled seeing or hearing about the role of fruits and vegetables in reducing potential risk for developing some types of cancer, while 85% of Canadians reported that they have heard about the health effects of low saturated and trans-fats in reducing potential risk for developing heart disease.

Nutrition Concerns

According to Tracking Nutrition Trends, Canadians' top nutrition concerns include fat (82%), vitamins (82%), saturated fats (80%), fibre (78%), calcium (77%), and protein 77%. Generally, women were more likely to be concerned with their nutrient intake compared to men, particularly when it comes to calcium (86% vs. 67%) iron (75% vs. 56%) and fat (85% vs. 80%). As well as being less concerned about total fat, men were also less concerned about the various types of fat (saturated fat, omega-3 fat, and trans-fatty acids).



References

- National Institute of Nutrition. (2002) *Tracking Nutrition Trends. An Update on Canadians' Nutrition-Related Attitudes, Knowledge and Actions, 2001.*
- National Institute of Nutrition. (2000). *Consumer Awareness and Attitudes Towards Functional Foods.*