

COVID-Related Diet Changes in a Multiethnic Sample of College Students

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BACKGROUND

- Research suggests varied dietary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including an increase in meal and snack frequency.¹
- While some studies report an increase in home cooking and fresh produce consumption, others report less favorable changes in diet patterns.²
- Limited research examines these patterns in college students.

OBJECTIVE

- To explore self-reported changes in food intake patterns during the COVID-19 pandemic in a multiethnic sample of college students.

METHODS

- A web-based survey was administered to students enrolled in a general education introductory nutrition course during the 2020-2021 academic year. Participants (n=436) were predominantly (77%) female; 39% identified as Hispanic/Latino, 33% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 19% identified as Caucasian.
- Two open-ended items were used to capture self-reported changes in food intake and drivers of those changes resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Food insecurity was assessed using the USDA six-item food security module.
- Two researchers collaborated to develop a codebook and assign codes independently to open-ended responses.
- Chi-square tests were used to investigate relationships between food security status and reported diet changes.

RESULTS



CONCLUSIONS

- A majority of participants (n=295, 67.7%) reported diet changes as a result of the pandemic. Participants indicated mixed impacts on food intake.
- Participants attributed diet changes to increased health consciousness, increased time at home, eating more home-prepared foods, changes in activity level, and increased feelings of boredom.
- Among respondents who reported a COVID-related diet impact, those experiencing food insecurity were more likely to report eating less healthy because of the pandemic.
- As universities develop strategies to promote health in the college student population, targeted strategies are needed.

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