

Nutrition and You: Trends 2008

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WHERE DID YOU HEAR THAT? AMERICAN DIETETIC ASSOCIATION SURVEY REVEALS POPULAR AND CREDIBLE SOURCES OF NUTRITION INFORMATION

CHICAGO – While Americans get most of their information on food and nutrition from television and magazines, these media have declined in popularity while the Internet has increased, according to the American Dietetic Association’s nationwide consumer opinion survey, *Nutrition and You: Trends 2008*. And ADA’s survey found “most popular source” does not necessarily mean “most credible.”

In an open-ended question, more than six in 10 respondents to ADA’s survey (63%) listed television as a source of food and nutrition, maintaining TV’s status as the most popular source since ADA began conducting its survey in 1991. (In the first two surveys, in 1991 and 1993, TV and radio were combined into one category.)

But while TV remains the most popular source, it has declined in popularity since ADA’s most recent survey in 2002 when it was named by 72%. Magazines came in second, named by 45% – also down substantially from its 2002 level (58%).

The Internet this year replaced newspapers as consumers’ third-most popular source of food and nutrition information, named by 24% of respondents – nearly double the 13% who said they got information from the Internet in 2002. The Internet was named by 6% in 2000 and by 3% in 1997.

ADA’s survey found use of the Internet to find food and nutrition information varies widely with age: from 42% of adults age 25-34 down to just 5% of those 65 and over.

Newspapers experienced a large drop in popularity since 2002, from 33% to 19%. In fact, almost every leading source of food and nutrition information has dropped in consumer popularity in the past six years – except for the Internet.

However, the most popular sources of information are among the least credible, according to ADA’s survey. The most credible sources – in a list read to respondents – were registered dietitians (78%), doctors (61%) and nurses (57%). RDs were considered especially credible by younger adults and people with the most education.

Television was named as very credible by just 14%; magazines by 25% and the Internet by 22%.

“This discrepancy between popular and credible sources of information may indicate people are paying more attention to the person providing the information than to the media that carries the message,” said registered dietitian and American Dietetic Association spokesperson Jeannie Gazzaniga-Moloo.

Doctors were the health professional most often named as a popular source, at 10%.

“When thinking of health professionals as a source, most people envision a visit to a practitioner’s office, or a consultation in a clinic or a hospital, so it makes sense that doctors would be mentioned more often than other health providers as popular sources,” Gazzaniga-Moloo said.

“But when we look at who is being quoted as the expert sources in the media, and who is increasingly writing the articles and the blogs that consumers read, the answer is registered dietitians, and people’s responses reflect that understanding.”

ADA’s survey shows 86% have heard of registered dietitians, statistically the same as the 2002 level of awareness.

Respondents also agreed by nearly a 3-to-1 margin (74% to 26%) that there is a difference between a registered dietitian and a “nutritionist.”

“It is noteworthy that consumers know there is a real difference,” Gazzaniga-Moloo said. “While literally anyone can call himself or herself a nutritionist, even someone with no qualifications whatsoever, a registered dietitian is a food and nutrition expert who must meet academic and professional requirements to earn – and maintain – the RD credential.

“The highest-quality and most reliable nutrition advice and services come from RDs, and the survey results clearly show this is a message that is getting through to the public,” Gazzaniga-Moloo said.

Approximately two in five survey respondents (43%) said they would be interested in a diet and nutrition consultation with a registered dietitian – up from 30% in 2000, the last time the question was asked. That figure increased to 49% when respondents were read a definition of a registered dietitian: “an experienced health professional with a college degree and training in food and nutrition science.”

The percentage of consumers interested in a consultation with an RD jumped to 61% if the visit were covered by the person’s health insurance.

“Expanding insurance coverage of medical nutrition therapy provided by registered dietitians has been a priority of the American Dietetic Association for many years,” Gazzaniga-Moloo said. “This potentially lifesaving benefit increasingly is being covered by insurance plans ranging from Medicare to private carriers.”

Earlier this year, Congress passed legislation, and then overrode President Bush’s veto, that should allow MNT to be expanded to cover therapy considered reasonable and necessary for the prevention of an illness or disability. Currently, Medicare and some insurance plans cover MNT provided by an RD for treatment of diabetes and kidney disease.

Participants in ADA's survey were asked about their awareness of the American Dietetic Association, and the credibility of ADA and its Web site, eatright.org, as a source of information. According to the survey, 62% of American adults have heard of ADA, up from 51% in 2002.

Fifty-six percent of consumers believe that ADA would be a very credible source of information and 59% said they would be interested in visiting ADA's Web site.

“Registered dietitians and the American Dietetic Association have worked hard to establish our credibility with the public, and we can see consumers are responding by turning to RDs and ADA for the straight story on food and nutrition,” Gazzaniga-Moloo said.

The American Dietetic Association is the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. ADA is committed to improving the nation's health and advancing the profession of dietetics through research, education and advocacy. Visit the American Dietetic Association at www.eatright.org.

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