

## Changes in food practices during COVID-19 lockdowns in Australia

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The World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 virus a pandemic in March 2020.<sup>(1)</sup> All Australian states had various restrictions and lockdowns during 2020.<sup>(2)</sup> The various lockdowns and restrictions caused changes in both food accessibility and availability.<sup>(3)</sup> There is a need to better understand what Australian adults do when compelled to significantly change many routine dietary behaviours with little notice. This study aimed to examine the self-reported food habits and behaviours of Australian adults during the COVID-19 restriction period in 2020. An online convenience cross-sectional survey was delivered via the Qualtrics platform. Respondents were asked about their experiences in Australia since the COVID-19 restrictions began. The survey was open from June to October 2020. The respondents were asked open-ended questions regarding their positive and negative food experiences, changes in food preparation, as well as changes in food practices that they were willing to continue with and any barriers to these intentions. The responses to the five open-ended questions were analysed by Leximancer, the content analysis software. A total of 764 respondents completed the survey. Most were female, from Victoria, married, university educated, spoke English at home, and half were not currently in paid employment. The mean (SD) age was 53.4 (18.1) years, and 34% were over 65 years old. Preliminary analysis indicated that the respondents identified “cooking from scratch”, “eating healthier” and “having less takeaway” as the developed positive food habits during COVID-19. Regarding the worst food experience they had during COVID-19, the respondents complained about the unavailability of staples due to panic buying or stock issues. Although some regarded cooking at home and having less takeaway as positive habits developed, some others felt that cooking more often and not being able to eat out or have takeaway food were among the worst experiences. Regarding the changes in cooking and food preparation practices, the respondents reported increased variety in meals, change in mealtimes, spending more time for cooking/food preparation and cooking/food preparation with family members. The respondents claimed that they were willing to continue to try new recipes and do more home cooking, buy food in bulk and plan meals, order online food deliveries, and eat with the family. The most frequently proposed reasons for not continuing with the food-related changes were “going back to work physically and associated time scarcity” and “missing eating out”. The findings indicate Australians’ dietary habits changed significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research should determine which dietary changes were sustained in the longer term. The findings add to the emerging literature about the changes in food habits during pandemics, which can assist future public health responses.

### References

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