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## Use of herbs and spices in cooking and food preparation in Australia

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The Mediterranean diet (MedDiet) is largely a plant-based dietary pattern which is associated with a reduced risk of numerous chronic diseases<sup>(1,2)</sup>. A traditional MedDiet contains a wide variety of wild herbs and spices, which are frequently used in cooking and food preparation<sup>(3,4)</sup>, and are a valuable source of antioxidants. However, little is known about herbs and spices use in Australian households. Therefore, the aim of this study was to determine the types of herbs and spices used in cooking and food preparation in Australian households. A cross-sectional study was undertaken amongst Australian adults aged  $\geq 18$  years. Participants were recruited via social media platforms requesting voluntary participation in an online survey. The survey tool included questions related to the types of herbs and spices used and consumed in Australian households, frequency of use, and the perceived level of confidence for use of herbs and spices in cooking and food preparation. Given the lack of a previously validated and reliable survey instrument, the authors developed a prototype questionnaire that was initially piloted against a separate representative sample for face validity. A total of  $n = 400$  participants responded and completed the survey. Participants were mostly female ( $n = 340$ ; 85.0%) with a mean age of  $46.5 \pm 14.7$  years and were overweight (BMI:  $26.4 \pm 6.0$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>). In the previous 12 months, two-thirds of participants ( $n = 258$ ; 64.8%) reported consuming herbs and spices 1-2 times per day, which were most commonly consumed as part of lunch or dinner meals ( $n = 372$ ; 94.2%). Basil ( $n = 391$ ; 97.8%), pepper ( $n = 390$ ; 97.5%), and garlic ( $n = 387$ ; 96.8%) were the most frequently used and consumed herbs and spices. A quarter of participants reported using basil 1-3 times per month ( $n = 104$ ; 26%), while a quarter reported using pepper ( $n = 104$ ; 26%) and garlic ( $n = 103$ ; 25.8%) daily. The majority of participants identified that they were extremely confident ( $n = 159$ ; 39.8%) or very confident ( $n = 149$ ; 37.3%) using herbs and spices in cooking and food preparation. Most participants ( $n = 282$ ; 70.5%) reported growing herbs and spices in their own homes. This cross-sectional analysis of Australian households shows that most Australian adults consume herbs and spices daily, with basil, pepper, and garlic being the most frequently consumed. Further investigation into the quantities needed to elicit potential health benefits of herbs and spices when incorporated into a healthy dietary pattern warrants future research.

**Keywords:** herbs; spices; cooking; health

### Ethics Declaration

Yes

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### References

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