

Unit 3.2.1

Patterns of Eating in Australia

Key Knowledge and Key Skills

Key Knowledge 3.2.1

The patterns of eating in Australia, including recent developments, changes and trends in food purchasing and consumption behaviours.

Key Skill 3.2.1

Discuss recent changes and current trends in food behaviours.

Key Skill 3.2.5

Discuss links between food, behaviours and effects on health and wellbeing

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Key Terms and Definitions

Consumption refers to using, buying, or eating something.

Patterns of eating refer to the quantities, proportions, variety, and combination of different foods and drinks that people eat and how often they eat them.

A **food fad** is merely 'fashionable' for a short time.

Any change in food purchasing or consumption becomes a **food trend** when it occurs over a long period of time.

Food Consumption and Purchasing Behaviours

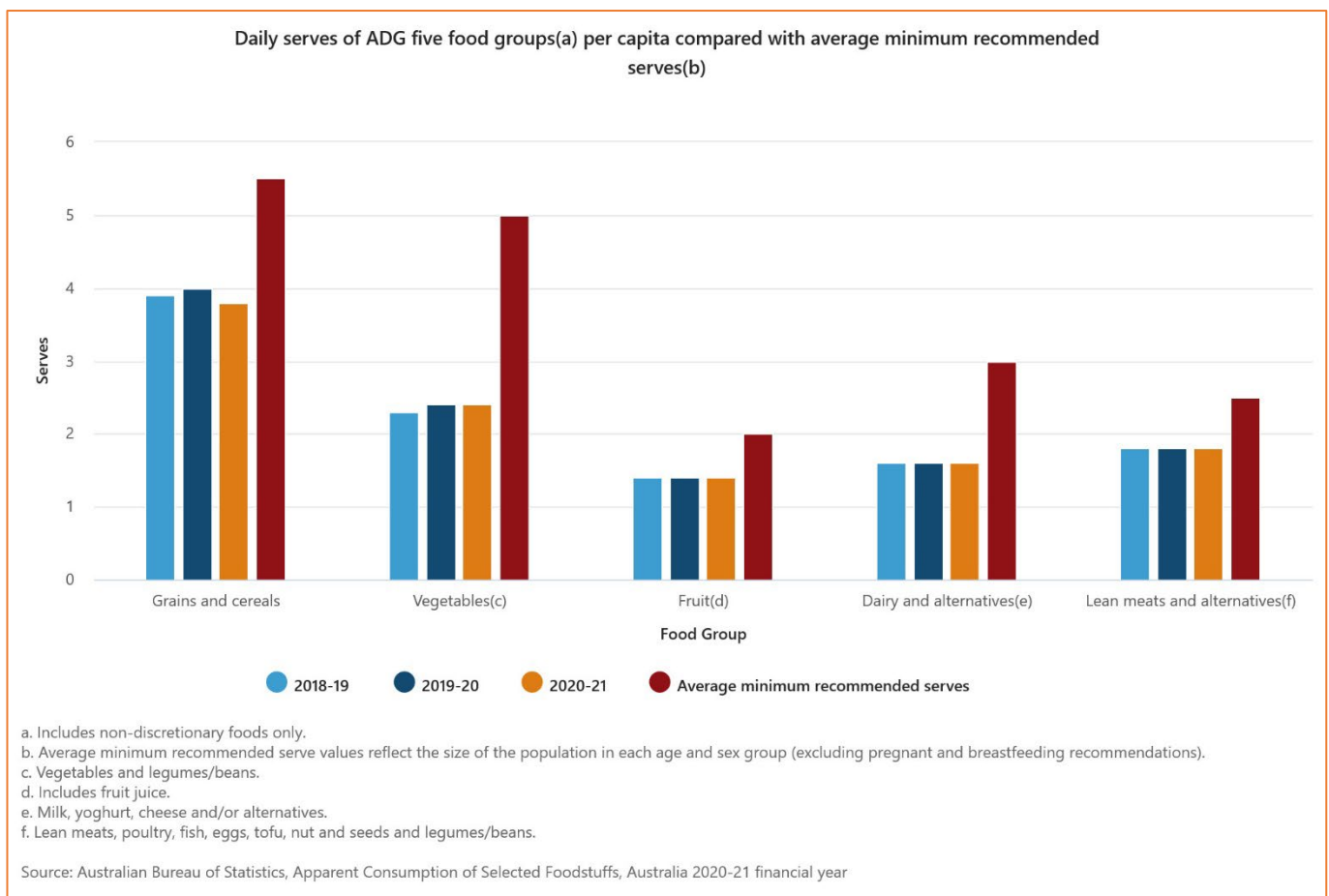
A range of factors influences food purchasing and consumption behaviours. Any change in food purchasing or consumption becomes a trend when it lasts a long period of time. It is important not to confuse a trend with a fad. A food fad is merely 'fashionable' for a short time; sometimes, food fads can develop into trends.

Over the years, Australia's buying and eating patterns have changed significantly.

Consumption of the Five Food Groups

The number of foods from the five food groups that Australians consume has not changed much over the last few years. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported little change in Australians' consumption of the five food groups during the previous 4 years. This indicates that Australians ignore or find it challenging to understand and follow the *Australian Dietary Guidelines* and the *Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*.

The graph below indicates little change in the consumption of the five groups in Australia from 2018 to 2021. In addition, these data also reveal that, on average, Australians are not consuming the recommended serves of food from each of the five food groups.

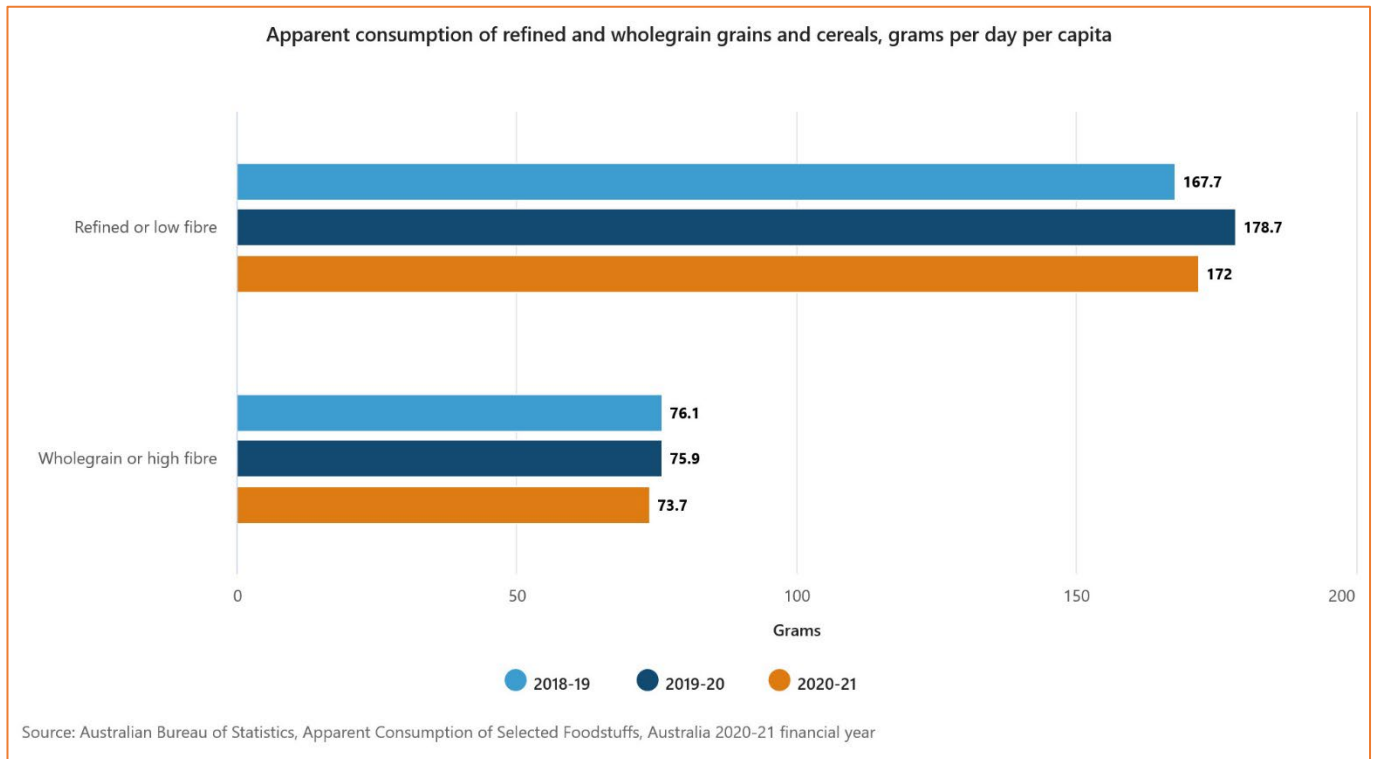


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020-2021) 'Daily serves of ADG five food groups(a) per capita compared with average minimum recommended serves(b)' Apparent consumption of Selected Foodstuffs, Australia, 11 September 2022.

Refined or Low-fibre Cereal Products

Additional data revealed that Australians are decreasing the amount of refined or low-fibre cereal products and wholegrain cereal products they consume, with an overall drop in 2020–2021 compared with 2019–2020. This decrease in carbohydrates consumed could be attributed to the range of low carbohydrate fad diets promoted in the media.

The graph below indicates little change in the apparent consumption of refined and wholegrains and cereals in Australia from 2020 to 2021. In addition, these data also reveal that, on average, Australians are consuming less refined or low fibre food products, but more wholegrain or high fibre food products.



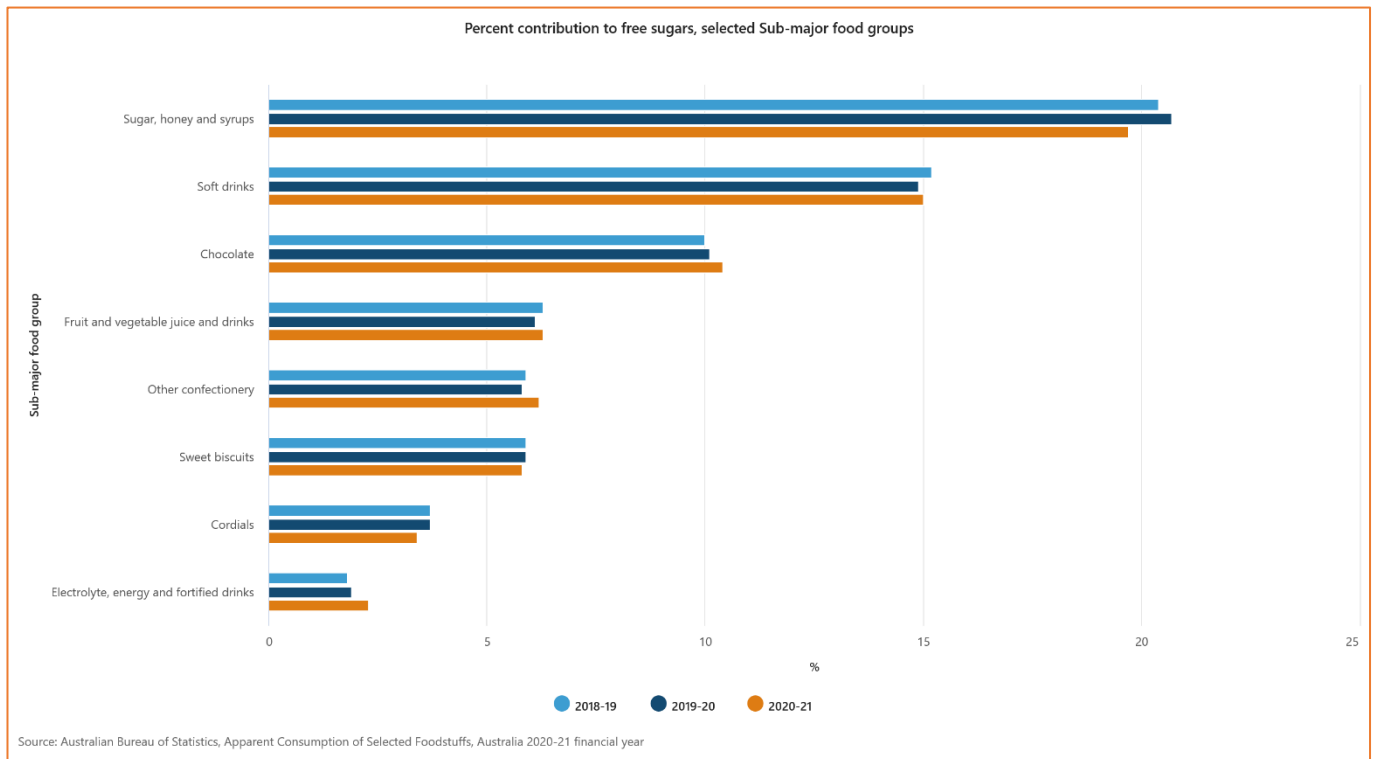
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020-2021) 'Apparent Consumption of Refined and Wholegrain Grains and Cereals, grams per day per capita' Apparent consumption of Selected Foodstuffs, Australia, 11 September 2022.

Foods containing Sugar

Australians, on average, consume about half a kilo of sugar each week – an amount that would surprise most people because much of it is invisible. Large amounts of sugar are smuggled into our diets through sweetened products such as cakes, pies, lollies and sugary drinks (Health and Wellbeing Queensland, 2022).

The table below indicates that while our consumption of some foods containing sugar is declining, the consumption of other foods such as chocolate, confectionery, and soft drinks has increased. The amount of people consuming electrolyte energy and fortified beverages has increased significantly.

This is a concern as electrolyte drinks are designed to replenish glucose, fluids, and electrolytes during strenuous activity. It is unlikely that those consuming these drinks are undertaking this type of exercise. The added sugar results in a significant amount of the kilojoules consumed, which may contribute to weight gain.



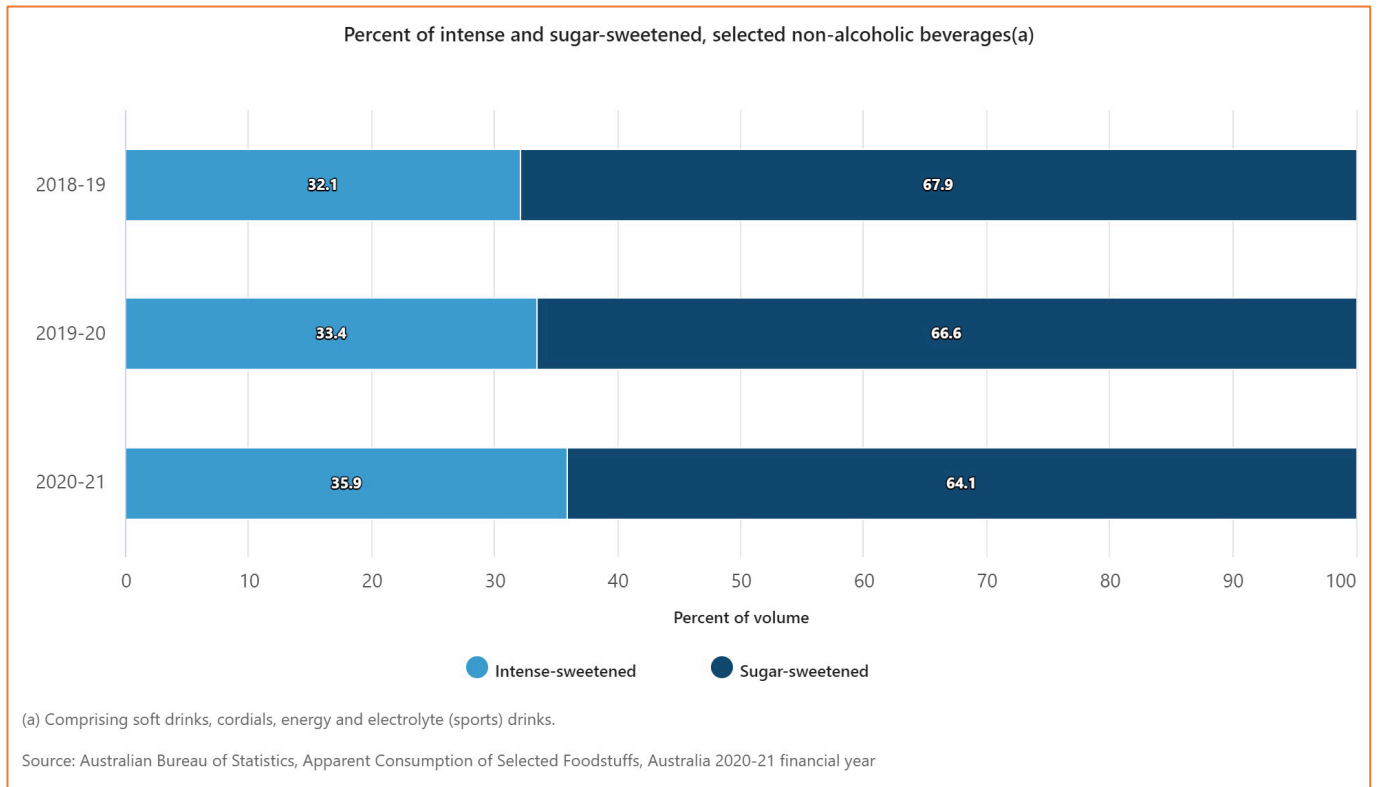
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020-2021) 'Percent Contribution to Free Sugars, selected Sub-major food groups', Apparent consumption of Selected Foodstuffs, Australia, 11 September 2022.

Intensely Sweetened (Diet) Beverages

It also appears that people's consumption of intensely sweetened (including 'diet,' 'no sugar,' and 'low joule') beverages has increased. In contrast, the consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks has decreased.

Intensely sweetened beverages contain food additives added to drink or food to replace the sweet taste of sugar and lower its energy value. They are often promoted as diet, reduced-sugar, or low in sugar products. Some intensely sweetened beverages contain artificial sweeteners, including aspartame, saccharin, and sucralose. Others contain a highly concentrated extract found naturally in some plants, including stevia and monk fruit extract. Evidence of the health impact of these intensely sweetened beverages is limited.

The increase in diet drinks consumption can be attributed to more people trying to lose weight. Consumption tends to be high in young people, and women are more likely to consume them than men (Hoare, et al., 2017).



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020-2021) 'Percent of intense and sugar-sweetened, selected non-alcoholic beverages(a), Apparent consumption of Selected Foodstuffs, Australia, 11 September 2022.

Packaged Convenience Foods Consumption

The 1990s are referred to as the 'Golden Age of the Lunchbox' due to the increased quantities of convenience foods produced and consumed. Since then, a steady increase of highly processed foods have appeared on our supermarket shelves. Over time, food products such as Lean Cuisine frozen meals, prepared curries and lasagnes, Chicken Tonight, and Tiny Teddies have become increasingly popular products to buy.

The reasons for the increasing rates of individually packaged and ready-made meals could include:

- an ageing population that lives on their own may be reluctant to prepare meals;
- working parents want to buy and make meals quickly; and
- the younger generation lacks the time and knowledge to prepare foods from scratch.

Snack Foods

Recent studies have suggested that Australians have increased the number of snacks they purchase and consume over the last few years (Neo, 2021).

One factor that may influence this trend is that more people are working from home and maybe inclined to eat more food throughout the day. Or, perhaps convenience stores that sell snack foods have become more accessible.

[Click here](#) to find some more detailed information and statistics about recent snack food habits of Australians.

Free-range Products Consumption

People are also thinking more about how ethical their food choices are and consider animal welfare when deciding what to eat and buy.

The National Peak Body, Egg Farmers of Australia, has announced that from 2006 to 2007, 71.4% of consumers purchased caged eggs compared with 23.4% purchasing free-range. From 2016 to 2017, 48.9% of consumers bought caged eggs and 41.3% purchased free-range eggs. This change in purchasing behaviour indicates that ethical issues influence Australians' food choices (New South Wales Farmers, 2018).



[Click here](#) to find out about the different terminology used to describe various ethical farming practices.

Organic Foods

Official legislation regarding organic food certification was introduced in 1991. Since then, there has been a steady increase in people purchasing and consuming organic foods.

This increase is possibly related to people's desire to consume foods that do not contain any chemical residue and their concern for the environment. Research by Australia Organic Limited revealed that 62% of people that purchased organic food in 2021 did so because they were concerned about the chemicals used when growing fresh produce and rearing animals and the impact on their health. Whereas 45% indicated they purchased organic foods because they believed the production method was more sustainable, (Australian Organic, 2021).

The table below shows an increase in organic agriculture in Australia. The land used for organic farming grew from 336,000 in 1995 to 35,645,000 hectares in 2018.

Description	1995	2000	2005	2000	2018
Total organic area ('000 ha)	336,000	546,000	887,000	1,736,000	35,645,000

(Kondinin Group, 2000).

Plant-based Meats

Plant-based food is made to replicate meat. It is produced to have the same sensory properties as animal-based foods. The foods are made to look, feel, smell, taste, and even sound like meat when it is cooked.

The range of plant-based foods on the market includes:

- cheese made from almonds, cashews, and macadamia nuts;
- dairy alternatives made from cereal grains like rice, legumes, and nuts; and
- meat alternatives produced from beans, mung beans, mushrooms, peas, and soy.

Many people consume plant-based meats because they are vegan or vegetarians and do not consume meat or meat products. However, plant-based meats are not just consumed by vegetarians. Some people think plant-based meats are healthier than eating meat and may decide to buy them for health reasons. Some plant-based foods may be beneficial; however, it is essential to read the list of ingredients and the nutritional information panel when selecting these foods. They can be highly processed and contain additives, fat, salt, and sugar.

Other people might buy and consume plant-based foods because they believe that purchasing plant-based meats is better for the environment than beef raised conventionally.

The CSIRO has reported that the plant-based meat industry could generate between \$3 and \$9 billion worth of sales by 2030, (Buxton, 2022).

As shown in the table below, the trend for buying and consuming plant-based meat products in Australia is increasing.

Year	Generated sales
2018–2019	A\$140 million
2019–2020	A\$185 million

(The Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade), 2022)

Purchasing Behaviours

Buying Locally

The number of people buying from local or smaller businesses seems to be increasing. As indicated in the graph below, in 1 year, the number of people buying from fresh food stores increased by more than 1000. The increase in people buying from smaller businesses might be due to people's desire to support businesses in their local communities.

There has been a decline in people buying from two of Australia's leading supermarkets, Coles and Woolworths, and a slight rise in the number of people shopping at ALDI. More people might shop at ALDI for the cheaper food options or the number of new ALDI stores opening in different locations may be increasing. Having more ALDI stores available might mean consumers have more stores to shop at, resulting in increased sales.

The number of Farmers' markets in Australia is also increasing. In 2004, there were 70 Farmers' markets in Australia and by 2015, this figure had grown to 180. This growth indicates that Australians are looking to buy local produce. Perhaps, not just because they support local farmers but also because they believe the market produce is better quality and fresher than the produce at supermarkets. They may also connect with the producers at these markets, (Harrison, 2017).

Use of Apps for Ordering Food

The development of technology has impacted how people purchase fast food (IbisWorld, 2022). Mobile phone applications, referred to as apps, enable users to order and pay for their food and track the delivery to their home address. In 2009, Dominos was the first fast-food chain to use apps for meal deliveries. A recent study revealed that COVID19 lockdowns accelerated the growth of meal delivery services and they have continued to increase

Online Grocery Shopping

Studies have indicated that the number of people shopping for their groceries online has increased dramatically over the last few years. Online grocery shopping became the 'new' norm for many Australians in 2020 due to the shopping restrictions they faced during the COVID19 lockdowns and people's desire to stay at home. However, the demand for online shopping has continued beyond COVID lockdowns. Recent reports indicate that around 45% of people have reported shopping for online groceries more now than before the pandemic (Redman, 2021)

Watch this video about a digital supermarket opening: https://youtu.be/OgmnKsD_99s

Meal Kit Delivery Services

A meal kit service delivers pre-measured ingredients along with a recipe to its customers. This is usually provided as a service until the consumer decides to no longer pay for and receive the meals.

Studies have revealed that meal kits have increased in popularity in Australia, particularly since 2020. People born between 1976 and 2005 make up 25% of the people purchasing meal kits, with people born before 1946 the least likely. In addition, women are more likely than men to pay for meal kit delivery services and city dwellers purchased more than those living in rural Victoria.

Some health professionals are concerned about the nutritional quality of the foods in meal kits. Recent research from Flinders University found that many of the recipes were high in salt, sugar, and saturated fat and low in dietary fibre (Newsdesk, 2020). Studies by the University of Sydney stated the portion sizes needed to be reduced and more wholegrains and leaner cuts of meats should be used (The University of Sydney, 2019).

Watch this video about the rise of the increasing popularity of meal kits: <https://youtu.be/pQ9ttyFO45E>