

The social dining habits of slimmers

Y Webb¹, WM Dear¹, C Kentish²

¹Discipline of Nutrition & Dietetics, University of Newcastle, NSW 2308

²Kentish and Associates, Newcastle, NSW 2308

The social dining habits of 242 female slimmers, aged 14-80 years from three cities are reported. Of the total, 150 (62%) lived alone, and 33 (13.6%) lived in a unit of two, the age range of this second person being 3-78 years. In 80% of cases this second person was an adult male partner. English was the language spoken at home in all but two groups.

Of the total, 15% were a guest of family or friends at least weekly. Of those who were less than 40 years of age, 22.8% were a guest at least weekly, while only 9.7% of the 40 and over age group were at least a weekly guest. Of those who were a guest at least weekly, 56.3% were less than 40 years of age. There was a significant statistical association between age (<40, ≥40) and frequency of dining as a guest ($\chi^2 = 7.199$, $df=1$, $P=0.007$). Those aged <40 had meals more often as a guest than those 40 years of age or over.

At least weekly, 32% had guests in for a meal. Of those <40 years, 18.8% had guests in weekly, while 38.8% of the 40 and over age group had guests at least weekly. Of those who had guests in weekly or more, 20.3% were aged < 40, and 79.7% were 40 or over. There was a significant statistical association between age (<40, ≥40) and frequency of having guests in for a meal ($\chi^2 = 9.715$, $df= 1$, $P=0.002$). Those aged 40 or over invited people in for a meal more often than those <40.

Of those who ate at restaurants, 18.6% ate there weekly or more. There was no statistical association between age and frequency of eating at a restaurant. This result may be due to the difficulty of defining a restaurant.

At least weekly, 44.3% of those aged <40 had takeaways. Of those who had takeaways at least weekly, 67.3% were aged <40. There was a highly significant association between age (<40, ≥40) and frequency of eating takeaways ($\chi^2 = 32.050$, $df=1$, $P=0.001$). The <40's ate takeaways more often than the 40 and over age group.

There were only 2 individuals of the whole sample who did not have guests or visit as guests and neither did they eat at restaurants or have takeaways.

Because of the small amounts of food required when eating alone or as a couple, one way to get the recommended food variety is in the social setting.

In summary, the dining habits demonstrated that these slimmers were a social group and were such that the behaviours of the group could be characterised by age. This has relevance when developing strategies for behaviour change related to weight loss programs and to food related education and promotion programs in industry and the media.

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