

# Is the food we eat harmful to us?

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**AMERICA'S SWEET TOOTH**  
America's sweet tooth has continued to grow. Consumption of sugar and other sweeteners is up by one-half since the early 1900s. The use of refined sugars recently has declined, but this has been more than offset by a four-fold increase in the use of corn syrup.  
Soft-drink consumption, which has tripled in the past 20 years to more than 38 gallons per person, accounts for almost one-fifth of our total use of sweeteners.  
But, while Americans eat more sugar in their processed foods and beverages, they are trying to cut back on their use of "visible" sugars. Our 1977 intake of sugar, syrups, honey, molasses, jellies and jams, and candy was only one-third to one-half what it was in 1965, according to the NFCS.



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**FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**  
Despite the urgings of generations of mothers to "eat your vegetables," our per capita consumption of fruits and vegetables has not changed much from the beginning of the century and is, in fact, down slightly from the peak levels of the mid-1940s.  
But there has been a remarkable shift from fresh to processed forms as a result of the introduction of freezing and improved methods of canning and dehydration.  
For example, our per capita consumption of processed citrus products is 25 times as great as it was in the late 1930s, before frozen concentrates were developed. We now eat only half as much fresh citrus products as processed.  
Our consumption of processed vegetables and fruits other than citrus has increased 400 percent since the early 1900s.

percent from peak consumption in the 1940s. Changes in lifestyles, such as skipping breakfast, as well as research suggesting a link between cholesterol and heart disease, may account for the decline in average egg consumption.  
Interestingly, though, this decline has not been uniform: Fewer people eat eggs now than in 1967, according to NFCS data, but those who do eat them eat more. The decline was particularly noticeable among men under 35.

**DIET AND HEALTH**  
These changes in the amounts and kinds of foods that make up the American diet have altered the levels of nutrients we consume. Of greatest concern are the new higher levels of fats and sugar, which, in excessive amounts, have been associated with heart disease and other health problems.  
These research findings and our changing diet led the Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services to issue a set of Dietary Guidelines for Americans in 1980.  
These guidelines included recommendations for reducing our consumption of fats, sugar and salt.  
If Americans truly are concerned about their health, we are likely to see a turnaround in some of the trends that have been developing in the American diet.

The views expressed in *Courses* by Neusspaer are those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the University of California, the National Endowment for the Humanities, or the participating newspapers and colleges.  
Next week: Sam Keen, contributing editor to *Psychology Today* magazine, discusses our food fads.

**FOODS OUT OF FAVOR**  
In contrast to the increases in many basic foods, there has been a substantial decline in the consumption of grain products and of potatoes and sweet potatoes.  
Americans today consume only slightly more than half the grain products and two-fifths the potatoes and sweet potatoes that we consumed in 1909-13.  
As with other vegetables, however, consumption of processed potatoes has increased markedly and now represents about one-third of all white potatoes eaten.  
Most of these are in the form of french fries, with the fast-food industry using about three-fourths of all frozen french fries packed.  
Egg consumption, too, has decreased — only slightly from early in the century, but more than 25

Development and not one of the respondents claimed to be a full-time homemaker. The group included women already married and a few who are already mothers.

**Who's cooking?**  
Words from Syracuse University say that even home economics graduates don't intend to spend much time cooking or keeping house.  
The university surveyed its 1980 graduating class in the College for Human

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