

Report 'Perception vs reality in the eating habits of Spaniards'

## 76% of the population rate their diet as good or excellent despite the fact that a third consume ultra-processed food almost every day

- According to the study carried out by Vivaz, Línea Directa Aseguradora's health insurance brand, the Spanish population has an optimistic view of their diet. 76% rate the quality of their food as good or excellent and all of them give themselves a favourable score, with an average of 7.3.
- However, 13.2 million Spaniards (one third of the adult population) admit to consuming ultra-processed food 3 or more days a week, and almost 24 million (66% of those surveyed) say they eat precooked meals. In addition, only 28% cook with fresh food, a vital aspect of cooking.
- Autonomous Communities: the inhabitants of the Balearic Islands (73%), Madrid (72%), Catalonia and the Canary Islands (71%) consume more precooked meals than the national average (66%). Meanwhile, those in Galicia (39%), Cantabria (52%) and Asturias and the Basque Country (55%) consume the least amount of precooked meals.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends eating at least 5 pieces of fruits and vegetables a day. However, only 4% of the adult population meets this guideline, the most common amount being 2 servings per day.
- Eating poorly can affect health. 57% of the Spanish population has been diagnosed with diseases in which their eating habits play a role, either as a risk factor, as part of the treatment or both.

**Madrid, 16 November 2022.** For a short while, the COVID-19 pandemic seemed to rekindle people's concern for healthy eating, cooking at home and using fresh ingredients. However, we seem to have forgotten those good intentions. This is precisely what the Vivaz report shows, as there is a strong dissonance between perception and reality in Spanish people's eating habits: **76% rate their diet as good or excellent** and everyone gives themselves a passing score, with an **average of 7.3**. However, **1 in 3 adults (13.2 million Spaniards) admit to consuming ultra-processed food 3 or more days a week, almost 24 million (66% of those surveyed) say they eat pre-cooked meals and 1 in 10 order food delivery 2 or 3 times a week or more.**

Here is the main conclusion drawn from the report '**Perception vs reality in the eating habits of Spaniards: Analysis of the perception of the quality of people's diet compared to the reality of their diet, cooking and shopping habits**' prepared by [Vivaz](#), Línea Directa Aseguradora's health insurance brand, through a **survey of more than 1,700 people**, and with the assistance of **Juan Revenga, one of the most renowned nutritionists in Spain and Vivaz's food consultant**.

**Poor nutrition is a reflection of current social transformation and habits.** The change in work rhythms and the socio-economic differences among citizens lead the food industry to offer alternatives that appear more convenient but are unhealthy, such as ultra-processed or ready-made meals, and people spend less time in the kitchen as a result.

**Lack of time and lack of knowledge are the main reasons that Spaniards cite for not cooking on a daily basis**, according to 6 out of 10 adults. The Vivaz study confirms that **only 28% of Spaniards cook with fresh food** (vegetables, legumes, meat, fish or eggs) every day. This state of affairs also highlights how little time Spaniards devote to teaching children to cook, as **only 7% get the youngest members of the household involved in the kitchen**. Cooking as a family, according to experts, is essential to teaching children good eating habits from an early age.

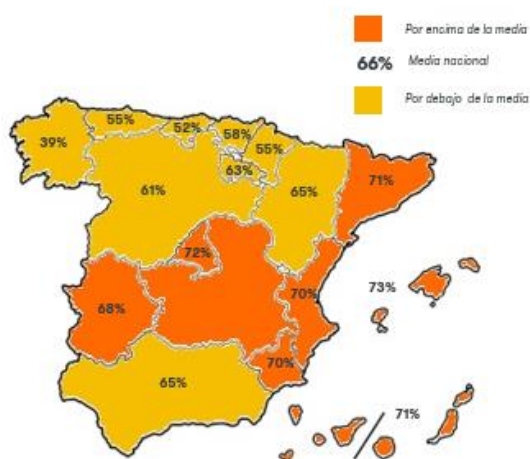
### Abuse of ultra-processed, ready-made and delivery food

**Ultra-processed foods are the main threat to a healthy diet**, due to the excess sugars, saturated fats and salt they contain, and they account for a third of the calories that adults in Spain consume each day. According to data from El Coco – a free mobile app that scans product barcodes to identify which ones are healthy – ultra-processed products make up 64% of the top sellers in supermarkets.

The choice of ultra-processed, ready-made and delivery food over cooking is particularly alarming among the youngest adults (18- to 29-year-olds). **Almost half of this age group consume ultra-processed food 3 or more days a week – well above the average** (one third) – and **80% consume pre-cooked meals every week**. In addition, 18% order home food delivery 2 or 3 times a week or more, a figure that is almost twice the national average (10%).

### Differences in precooked meal consumption by Autonomous Community

By Autonomous Community, the inhabitants of the **Balearic Islands (73%), Madrid (72%), Catalonia and the Canary Islands (71%)** consume more pre-cooked meals more than once a week than the national average (66%).



Meanwhile, people in **Galicia (39%), Cantabria (52%) and Asturias and the Basque Country (55%)** consume the least amount of pre-cooked food.

These results show that **the north of Spain eats less pre-cooked food than the rest of Spain, while the Mediterranean arc (central and eastern Spain and the islands) is more likely to opt for ready-made meals**, according to respondents' answers.

### Only 2 servings of fruits and vegetables a day

A piece of fruit has fewer calories, is more satisfying and is nutritionally much more positive than any ultra-processed snack. However, **only 4% of the population eats at least 5 pieces of fruits and vegetables a day, which is the amount recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO)**, with 2 daily servings being the most common amount (23%).

Similarly, the Spanish population does not incorporate lasting good habits into their nutrition, but decides to go on diets despite the proven ineffectiveness of dieting in achieving medium- and long-term goals. This is so much the case that, according to data from the Vivaz study, and in line with other scientific studies, **around six out of ten Spaniards say that they have been on a diet at some point, and half of those who have been on a diet have put on weight.**

### Price: a key factor when shopping

According to the Vivaz study, Spaniards are driven by price when shopping, particularly in the current context of high inflation. In fact, **for almost 50% of Spaniards, price is the most important factor when it comes to shopping**, above nutritional quality or whether the food is fresh. Also, **half of Spaniards acknowledge having changed what goes in their shopping trolley due to the rise in prices in recent months.**

When it comes to choosing a shop, **60% of Spaniards prefer to buy in supermarkets** as opposed to other retailers such as street markets, which always have a higher proportion of fresh and seasonal products. In addition, **almost half of Spaniards (48%) do not pay attention to product nutritional labels.**

### Risk factors associated with poor diet

How we eat has an impact on our health. In fact, **in recent years, there has been an increase in noncommunicable diseases (NCDs)** such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. This is to some extent due to the shift away from the dietary patterns associated with the Mediterranean diet, the increase in ultra-processed foods as well as the lifestyle in big cities. **Some 57% of the population has been diagnosed with diseases involving their eating habits** (either as a risk factor, as part of the treatment or both), including cholesterol, high blood pressure, chronic digestive or intestinal diseases such as gastritis, Crohn's disease or type 2 diabetes.

In order to reduce these factors, which are key throughout life, as much as possible, Vivaz and Juan Revenga, nutritionist and consultant for Línea Directa Aseguradora's health insurance brand, recommend maintaining the following healthy eating habits:

- 1. Consume at least 5 servings of fruits and vegetables a day.** A good way to achieve this goal is to include a serving of plant-based foods at lunch, dinner and in desserts. This already provides 4 of the recommended 5 servings.
- 2. Cut down on ultra-processed foods.** These products are high in sugar and contain excessive levels of energy, unhealthy fats and salt. The motto is: the less the better.
- 3. Cook at home.** Cooking what you eat is a decisive factor in maintaining good eating habits, but only if you cook with fresh food. Cooking is not heating, baking, frying or adding water to precooked meals.

4. **Get your children involved in the kitchen.** This is the best way to pass on good habits at home to the little ones. It is not about telling them what to eat, but about involving them in the tasks of buying and preparing food.

### Methodology

This report is part of the research project carried out by **Vivaz**, Línea Directa Aseguradora's health insurance brand, and the dietician, nutritionist and biologist Juan Revenga, professor at San Jorge University and Francisco de Vitoria University, member of the Spanish Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and consultant for Vivaz Seguros de Salud. The objective is to analyse the perception of the quality of the Spanish population's diet versus the reality of their dietary, cooking and shopping habits. To carry out the study, 1,700 online surveys were conducted among people between 18 and 75 years of age. The surveys took place between 30 August and 6 September 2022. The sample universe has been distributed proportionally by Autonomous Community (minimum of 90 respondents in each one) and in quotas by sex and age, with overall results that allow a margin of sampling error of +/- 2.38%. The results have been weighted to fit the target audience to guarantee the population was represented at the national level.

### About Vivaz

**Vivaz** is the health brand of **Línea Directa Aseguradora S.A.** It offers innovative health insurance that is easy to manage, providing excellent value for money and comprehensive healthcare for policyholders. Its medical resources include 30,000 professionals and 1,000 health centres. It is also the first health insurance to reward its customers for having healthier lifestyles, with direct discounts on their policy and other gifts in its marketplace.

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