

# How the UK **REALLY** eats

## Health, Habits and Hidden Opportunities

What our diets say about energy, health, and the opportunity for change.

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# 1. Introduction

For more than 35 years, Good Food has been at the heart of what and how Britain eats. As the UK's biggest food media brand, we've always championed recipes, trends and insights that shape the national conversation around food. Food is about more than just flavour - it's about health, energy, sustainability and the choices people are able to make in real life.

Starting January 2026, UK food and drink advertising is undergoing its most significant transformation in decades. The incoming HFSS (high in fat, salt, or sugar) (also called LHF, less healthy food) restrictions mark more than just a regulatory update – they reflect a shift in how less healthy foods are marketed to the public and the desire to change the nation's food culture. For food media brands, this isn't a setback – it's a pivotal opportunity. We see this as a chance to champion brands that are ready to adapt, engage creatively, and build genuine connections with their audiences through compelling content and values-led narratives.

That's why, for the 11th year running, we've carried out the Good Food Nation survey: our annual deep dive into the habits, hopes, and hidden challenges shaping how the UK really eats. Each year, the survey reveals what's changing (and what isn't) across diets, attitudes, and behaviours.



This year, our focus is sharper than ever. To coincide with the launch of our new sub-brand, Good Health, we've dedicated the survey primarily to health. Good Health is our new digital-first platform built on four pillars: wellbeing, fitness, healthy eating, and individual health conditions and diets. It cuts through noise and misinformation with clarity, authority, and a no-nonsense approach to living well. From myth-busting TikTok trends to evidence-based advice, it's designed to meet audiences where they are, while helping advertisers and partners connect with them in ways that feel fresh, credible, and useful.

This whitepaper is structured to bring these insights to life in a clear, practical way. Each chapter explores a core theme, from the nation's energy crisis to shifting generational diets and the barriers stopping people from eating well, supported by robust survey data from YouGov. Alongside the numbers, you'll find some scattered expert commentary that gives context and perspective, as well as recipes and real-life food ideas that show how change can translate to everyday plates.

The findings reveal a nation both more health-conscious and more fatigued than ever. They uncover not just what people know, but what they can (and can't!) do when it comes to eating better. And they spotlight opportunities for brands to be more than bystanders: to instead play an active role in making healthy choices easier, more affordable, and more desirable.

We hope you enjoy exploring the insights, ideas and opportunities in these pages, and that they spark fresh conversations about how we can all help the UK eat, live and feel better.





## 2. Executive Summary

The 11th year of the Good Food Nation survey reveals a country caught between aspiration and reality. Across the data, three themes stand out: people are tired, they are trying, and they are confused.



**Tired.** Energy has become one of the nation's most pressing health concerns. One in four adults regularly feel low on energy, and only just over a third (36%) claim they usually have enough energy to get through the day. Quick fixes - from caffeine and chocolate to crisps and energy drinks - dominate, but they rarely provide lasting relief. Instead, they reinforce the cycle of fatigue.



**Trying.** Despite these challenges, many are consciously working to eat better. When asked to rate their diets on a scale of 0-10 (with 0 being unhealthy and 10 very healthy) (49%) described their diet as healthy, with 40% saying it was neither healthy or unhealthy. Protein, fibre and vitamin D are the nutrients people most want to add to their diets. Almost half (47%) have tried an eating plan or diet in the past two years, reflecting both curiosity and commitment.



**Confused.** Knowledge itself is not the blocker: just 7% of adults say they don't know what's healthy. The real barriers are structural. Cost is the biggest, with 36.5% citing the price of healthier food as too high. Convenience, time pressure and contradictory advice also hold people back, leaving even motivated consumers struggling to follow through.



**Generational contrasts.** These pressures look different depending on age. Younger adults are more likely to experiment with diets and turn to energy drinks or snack bars to get through the day, while older generations lean on traditional meals and hot drinks for comfort. Over-55s tend to plan their meals more consistently, while younger adults (35-44) are more likely to leave breakfast unplanned (23%) or skip breakfast entirely (14%), reinforcing mid-morning slumps.

**The takeaway.** The modern British diet is shaped as much by barriers and fatigue as by aspiration. People want to eat well but are constrained by cost, convenience and mixed messages. For brands and partners, the opportunity is not just to educate but to enable: making healthier choices more affordable, accessible and appealing. By doing so, they can help consumers move from tired and trying to genuinely thriving.



# 3. Running on empty

While rising gas and electricity bills are hitting the headlines, there's an emerging energy crisis taking place across the UK that is regularly being overlooked: the human energy shortage.

Far from a trivial annoyance, low energy has become a defining feature of daily life. Around one quarter of UK adults now report frequent weariness, painting a picture of a nation that needs a boost.

This widespread fatigue often transcends age, gender, and lifestyle, creating a collective drag on mood, productivity, and overall wellbeing while at the same time sparking confusion over the foods that are keeping us alert, and those contributing to the problem.

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**24% of UK adults regularly feel low on energy.** Fatigue is not an isolated complaint, but well on its way to becoming an everyday experience. People describe struggling to get through the day, with energy levels fluctuating unpredictably to shape everything from work performance to social life.
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**31% say their energy levels rise and fall significantly throughout the day.** These peaks and troughs create frustration, especially when fatigue hits at predictable 'slump' moments. They also reinforce reliance on short-term fixes — often sugar-loaded snacks which rarely resolve the underlying problem.
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**25% report poor sleep,** and fewer than one third claim to sleep well, directly impacting next-day energy. Many begin the day already in an energy deficit, turning immediately to caffeine or sugar in search of a lift. These choices can worsen sleep when consumed later, trapping people in a cycle of tiredness.





- ✿ **20% regularly experience bloating** or other forms of digestive discomfort. Snacks seen as 'energy-boosting foods' — from sweets and chocolate to crisps and fizzy drinks — are often the culprits.
- ✿ **While 17% say they generally feel motivated or focused,** 37% say they often feel tired or drained while 21% often feel low or down. These figures show that low energy doesn't only affect the body — it undermines concentration, productivity and mood. For many, tiredness is as much about mental fog as it is about physical exhaustion, with the potential to impact both performance and memory.
- ✿ **The NHS itself recognises the phenomenon,** using the acronym TATT ('tired all the time'). The fact that a medical shorthand exists highlights how widespread and normalised fatigue has become. But everyday tiredness still carries personal and societal costs, even if it is rarely treated with urgency.
- ✿ Younger adults and women are most likely to feel low on energy. These groups are disproportionately affected, though fatigue is present across all demographics. Even when comparing students, workers, unemployed adults, parents and non-parents, the differences are minimal — everyone is tired.

Fatigue has become a structural feature of daily life, fuelled by poor sleep, volatile diets, and 'energy-boosting foods' that often backfire. For advertisers and brands, this is not a niche wellbeing issue but a universal consumer reality. Positioning products and campaigns around energy and around helping people escape the fatigue cycle offers a rare chance to speak directly to one of the most relatable problems in day to day life in the UK today.










## The daily drag: predictable energy slumps

Low energy doesn't just appear at random. It follows a rhythm that most people will recognise: a sluggish mid-morning, a sharp afternoon crash, and a fading sense of focus as the day winds down. These 'slump moments' are so common that they've shaped cultural habits, from elevenses to the afternoon tea break. What feels like a personal failing is in fact a near-universal biological and behavioural pattern.

The UK's most common [energy boosters](#) (sugar and caffeine) work, but only in the short term. They deliver a quick lift in alertness and mood, which is why they remain so popular. Yet these boosts are deceptive. They trigger biological processes that almost guarantee a subsequent crash, leaving people feeling worse than before while at the same time reinforcing dependence on the very same products.

-  **Almost one third of UK adults notice energy levels changing** throughout the day, with high-energy peaks interspersed with sluggish troughs. This tends to be most noticeable amongst full time students, where just over half (51%) experience these slumps, although even 21% of the retired population also feel them.
-  **Mid-morning slumps often occur around 10:30am** when early caffeine or sugary breakfasts have begun to wear off, leaving people flagging. For many, the morning routine sets up this dip: a coffee and slice of toast at 7:30am delivers a blood sugar spike, but [hours later the crash arrives](#).
-  **There's also a marked dip around 3pm.** The 'afternoon crash' is so entrenched that workplaces often design informal breaks around it. Biologically, circadian rhythms naturally dip in alertness during this window, but food choices can intensify the effect. A refined carb-heavy lunch, for example, can leave employees glassy-eyed as important afternoon meetings begin or students struggling to focus in classes later in the day.
-  **Many people (31%) experience more than one slump per day.** For these individuals, low energy is not an occasional inconvenience but a recurring cycle. Each slump reinforces reliance on quick fixes – a chocolate bar at 11am, an energy drink at 3pm – and each fix only postpones the problem. By evening, many feel completely drained, despite having consumed multiple 'boosts'.
-  **Data shows a little variation in energy fluctuations between demographics.** Students and unemployed adults are the most likely to struggle with energy spikes and crashes. However, 31% of workers, 37% of those with children at home, and even 28% of those with no children also feel the same. The reality is stark: whatever your lifestyle, it can be difficult to maintain stable energy levels throughout the day.

When energy runs low, most people don't pause to consider the long-term impact. They want something immediate, accessible, and reassuringly familiar. The UK's 'energy toolkit' reflects this reality: hot drinks, [sugary snacks](#), crisps, and in younger demographics, energy drinks. These habits are entrenched, culturally reinforced, and often shared across generations. Yet convenience rarely translates into sustained energy, meaning these quick fixes rarely offer a solution to the problem.

★ **Energy drinks are chosen by 15%**, with uptake highest among younger adults. For under-25s, they've become the defining shortcut for late-night studying, gaming, and work demands. Branding around vitality and performance has made them aspirational, though evidence shows long term effectiveness and safety to be questionable.

Older adults, by contrast, rarely touch them. Healthier alternatives are possible. Perfect Ted uses matcha to provide slow and steady energy along with a boost of nutrients.

★ **Crisps, popcorn, crackers and rice cakes** are used by 17%, often selected as 'lighter' or savoury alternatives to sweets. However, these starchy snacks are typically high on the [glycaemic index](#). This means they digest quickly, delivering a short-term boost that fades just as fast. They are eaten more for habit, convenience and flavour than for genuine energy management.



Slump moments are both biological and cultural fixtures, making them highly predictable points of need. For advertisers, this predictability can be a powerful tool.

Consumers already suspect that the rollercoaster is unsustainable. Brands that acknowledge this openly and offer credible alternatives can position themselves as allies in the search for steady energy that can be sustained throughout the day.

A well-timed campaign at 10:30am or 3pm is not just contextually relevant, it intercepts consumers at the exact moment they're searching for relief; for a solution to their problem. By aligning product positioning with these natural dips, brands can transform themselves from background noise into timely, trusted problem-solvers.



### The wider web: mood, sleep and digestion

Energy is never just about food or drink. It is part of a wider web of lifestyle factors, such as [sleep quality](#), [gut health](#) and emotional wellbeing, that all intersect. The difficulty for consumers is that these elements often work against each other. Poor sleep prompts high caffeine intake. Quick fixes cause bloating. Digestive discomfort makes people feel less motivated. What begins as tiredness cascades into a broader problem that affects mood, productivity and decision-making.

♥ **26% feel that nutritional advice is contradictory or overwhelming**, with younger adults generally struggling more to understand what's best for them. The confusion created by competing dietary messages leaves many unsure how to eat for stable energy. In the absence of clarity, they default to convenience, choosing foods that deliver speed but not sustainability.

♥ The human energy shortage cannot be separated from the wider lifestyle context in which it exists. Tiredness is compounded by poor sleep, digestive discomfort, and the frustration of not knowing who to trust. For advertisers, acknowledging this is crucial. Solutions that situate themselves within the broader web of energy — speaking to mood, focus, digestion and rest, not just diet — will resonate as credible and empathetic in a market where many products over-promise and under-deliver.



# Gut Health, DE-HYPED



Dr Megan Rossi,  
The Gut Health Doctor

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## 1. Kombucha cures fatigue

Despite the hype, there's no solid scientific evidence that kombucha helps with fatigue outside of the small amount of caffeine it contains. While traditional kombucha has been produced for thousands of years and contains organic acids and other bioactive compounds that could theoretically support health, we still lack high-quality clinical trials to substantiate any health claims. On top of that, many supermarket versions have very short fermentation periods (limiting the production of potentially healthful compounds) and often contain added sweeteners like stevia or other sugar substitutes, which the World Health Organisation now advise against in terms of supporting weight management or lower risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease.

## 2. Gluten-free = healthier

Going gluten-free doesn't automatically mean a healthier diet. Many gluten-free alternatives are more expensive, contain more additives, are higher in fat, and lower in protein. Unless you've been advised to avoid gluten for medical reasons, there's no health advantage to cutting it out.

## 3. UPFS are all the same

Unfortunately, the current classification system focuses on the level of processing, without considering the health benefits certain foods can provide, which explains why not all UPF is created equal in terms of health. For example, many plant-based milks are fortified with essential nutrients like calcium and iodine, which are particularly valuable for individuals following animal-free diets. However, this fortification automatically categorises them as "ultra-processed." On the other hand, ingredients like palm fat and added sugars aren't classified as UPFs (they fall in category 2 of the Nova system), yet we know they've been linked with poor gut and wider health outcomes. So, the system isn't a fair predictor of how nutritious or healthful a food actually is.



#### **4. Probiotic pills fix everything**

Even if a product promises clever capsule technology and billions of bacteria, there are no clinical trials to show that taking a generic probiotic supplement will boost overall gut health or digestion. Instead, we know that the benefits are unique to the different types (which are called strains). For example, certain probiotic strains have been shown to support your gut microbiome during and after antibiotic use, reduce the risk of colds and flu, ease infant colic, or support vaginal health. But those effects don't apply across the board - you need the right strain (type of bacteria), at the right time (for a specific issue), in the right way (this is where format and dose matter i.e. capsule or liquid etc).

#### **5. Carbs at lunch kill productivity**





That after-lunch slump has its own name – postprandial somnolence, better known as a food coma. But eating carbs at lunch isn't necessarily the problem. Fibre, which is a type of carbohydrate, actually helps slow digestion and keeps you fuelled for longer. The key is the type of carbohydrate you're choosing. For example, a meal heavy in refined carbs (e.g. white bread, white pasta, pastries, etc) may leave you feeling hungry sooner, whereas including fibre-rich options like wholegrains, vegetables, and legumes can provide sustained energy release.





## Towards better options

If the UK is stuck in a cycle of fatigue and quick fixes, the obvious question is: what works better? The evidence points towards foods and habits that deliver steady, sustainable energy rather than sharp spikes and crashes. These alternatives are not exotic or inaccessible. They are everyday options that, when presented in the right way, can help consumers escape the rollercoaster and feel consistently energised.

-  **Low-GI foods** release energy more slowly and evenly. Wholegrains, **beans**, lentils and oats digest at a steadier pace, helping to stabilise blood sugar levels and reducing the risk of mid-morning or mid-afternoon crashes. Unlike sugary cereals or white bread, they keep people fuelled for longer, providing greater long term stability and a foundation for better focus and productivity.
-  **Protein and fibre** are some of the most sought after nutrients for those experiencing a slump. Snacks such as yoghurt paired with fruit, nuts, seeds, and balanced bars help consumers feel fuller and maintain concentration. Unlike high sugar options, protein **activates** orexin cells in the brain – linked to wakefulness and alertness – while fibre slows digestion for steadier energy release..
-  **Nutrients such as B vitamins, vitamin C, magnesium and L-theanine** support energy metabolism. These are essential to the body's ability to convert food into usable energy. While absent in many common quick fixes, they can be obtained from fortified foods, supplements, or naturally nutrient-dense options like leafy greens, citrus fruits, and green tea, so there are plenty of options
-  **Lifestyle factors** compound the effect. Adequate sleep, regular hydration, and short bursts of physical activity all play an important role in maintaining stable energy. These don't require radical lifestyle overhauls; even small, manageable changes can have a measurable impact on daily vitality.

The solutions to Britain's energy crisis already exist, they are just less visible, less convenient, and less embedded in daily routines than the quick fixes. For advertisers and partners, the opportunity is to translate these better options into formats that feel accessible, desirable, and easy to integrate into daily life. Products positioned not only as 'boosts' but as steady, reliable companions throughout the day can break through the fatigue cycle and claim a distinctive, trusted space in the market.





## A day in the life: energy timeline

Energy instability is not random. It follows a daily pattern shaped by circadian rhythms, meal timing, and food choices. Mapping these highs and lows shows why so many people feel they are 'running on empty' – and highlights the difference that better options could make in terms of long term energy and motivation.



**7-9am:** A quick breakfast sets the tone. Many start the day with white toast, sugary cereal, or a strong coffee. These provide an immediate lift but wear off within hours, leading to the first slump of the day. By 10:30, the initial caffeine hit or sugar spike has faded, leaving people struggling to stay alert.

**10:30am:** The first major slump. Biscuits, chocolate and energy drinks are the go-to solutions at this point. They deliver fast relief when needed most, but rarely sustain it. Within an hour or two, many feel as tired as they did before.

**1pm:** Lunch choices shape the afternoon. A carb-heavy lunch – regular items like sandwiches, pasta, or rice bowls – can leave people fighting sleepiness by early afternoon. Those who skip lunch entirely often feel even worse, with extreme hunger driving poor snack choices later in the day.

**3pm:** The afternoon crash. Widely recognised as the lowest point for focus and motivation, this is when crisps, sweets and fizzy drinks peak in popularity. Energy rises briefly, but by 5pm many describe themselves as feeling drained.

**Evening:** Recovery or relapse. Tiredness often drives evening snacking, with chocolate, crisps and processed foods providing comfort more than genuine energy. Plus, for those consuming caffeine late in the day, sleep quality is reduced, ensuring the cycle begins again the very next morning.

## Alternative timeline: what better choices look like

If the UK is stuck in a cycle of fatigue and quick fixes, the obvious question is: what works better? The evidence points towards foods and habits that deliver steady, sustainable energy rather than sharp spikes and crashes. These alternatives are not exotic or inaccessible. They are everyday options that, when presented in the right way, can help consumers escape the rollercoaster and feel consistently energised.

**BREAKFAST:** Start the day with a breakfast which delivers sustained energy to set yourself up for the day and lessen the chance of a fight against energy dips mid-morning. A protein- and fibre-rich choice such as oats with unsweetened yogurt, fruit, seeds and nut butter; or wholemeal bread, eggs, avocado and tomatoes will cause less of a blood sugar spike and crash than toast or cereal.

**SNACKS:** Have more nutrient rich snacks on hand to avoid reaching for biscuits or sweets – unsweetened yogurt with fruit, veg sticks and houmous, apple dipped in nut butter.

**SNACKS:** Rather than snacking on rice cakes and crackers in isolation – level up your snack with the addition of some protein and nutrient rich foods. Low-fat cheese with tomato slices, nut butter with apple slices.

**LUNCH:** Avoid white bread/white pasta-based options, instead choose those with a rich source of protein and fibre, plus plenty of vegetables to bulk out the meal and make it more energy sustaining. Well selected prepacked meals can hit these requirements or prep foods at home.

**3PM SLUMP:** Switch your 3pm coffee/tea, and any subsequent ones, to a decaf version for the same ritual but without the added risk of sleep disruption. Ideally limit caffeine intake from around midday to minimise risk to sleep quality.





Plan in 10 minutes of fresh air at 3pm instead of reaching for the biscuits and coffee. This can boost mood and avoid a continuing cycle of sugar-crash-sugar-crash. Avoid skipping meals and plan in nutrient-rich snacks to help keep energy and blood sugar levels stable throughout the day.



# 4. Then vs Now

## Have we made any progress?

Five years may not sound like a long time, but in the world of food and health, it has been a period of dramatic change. From the way global events have reshaped our routines and the rise of new influences guiding what we eat, to how we judge our own health – and the nation's – the UK's relationship with food looks very different today than it did in 2020. And it's clear that how the UK eats has shifted not only because of individual choices but also because of major global and domestic shifts.

-  **The pandemic redefined eating routines.** During lockdown, people cooked more at home and turned to nostalgic foods for comfort. Baking cakes, hearty pasta dishes, and familiar snacks made a comeback, reviving family meals but also reinforcing indulgent habits that stuck after restrictions lifted.
-  **The cost-of-living crisis has changed food priorities.** Rising food and energy prices pushed affordability ahead of aspiration. Many have traded down to cheaper, calorie-dense foods at the expense of fresh produce. For families under pressure, the healthiest option was rarely the most realistic choice.
-  **Global media trends fuel curiosity,** with streaming platforms introducing new cultural touchpoints. The rise of Korean dramas, for instance, has boosted interest in Korean culture, from K-pop to [kimchi](#). This has led to a broader rise in Asian cuisines and tastes, especially among adventurous audiences.
-  **Trade and global disruption have reshaped food availability.** Brexit and supply chain interruptions have changed which foods are accessible and at what price. Consumers have become more aware of food volatility, with some items rising sharply in cost or disappearing from supermarket shelves entirely. Anyone with a sweet tooth will have noticed the rising cost of chocolate, while coffee prices are also impacted by climate change.

Eating habits cannot be separated from these wider forces that are at play. For advertisers, recognising the impact of affordability, access, and culture is key to building campaigns that resonate with the realities today's consumers are facing.



## Who and where we're learning from

External pressures may shape what's available, but it's influence that shapes how people think about those options. The past five years have transformed where consumers learn about food and health, and who they're willing to listen to.



**21% of consumers get their food information from some form of food media.**



**31% of 18–24s use social media for food guidance.** 31% of 18–24s use social media for food guidance. TikTok and Instagram act as recipe books, nutrition guides, and lifestyle advisors. Trends move quickly, but their volume creates information overload as well as dining inspiration.



**Generational divides are stark.** Just 2% of over-55s have tried a food hack, compared with 19% of 18–24s. Older groups remain sceptical while younger groups experiment daily, creating distinct challenges for messaging.



**Platform preference matters.** Instagram leads for food content, particularly among women, while men lean towards YouTube. This influences not just the content but the depth of engagement — quick hacks versus longer infotainment style videos.



**Social influence converts to action.** Among 25–34s, 21% have bought a food product after seeing it online, and 10% have changed how they eat based on influencer content. Influence directly shapes behaviour and purchase. Healthier brands have a real opportunity to shine in the new HFSS world.



**Immigration introduces new role models.** Immigrant communities bring traditions of scratch cooking, communal eating, and plant-based staples, expanding options while normalising diverse habits across wider audiences.



**Food labels are rarely a source of learning.** 28% of consumers say they check the labels on their food packaging, but 19% find them confusing. Labelling risks alienating rather than educating if clarity and simplicity are not prioritised.

Influence is fragmented, but powerful. For advertisers, the opportunity lies in simplifying complexity, using trusted voices, and ensuring inspiration leads to clarity, confidence, and positive everyday choices — rather than confusion or fatigue.

## Health and diet comparisons

# “WE’RE MORE AWARE, BUT NOT NECESSARILY BETTER”

How people rate their own diets versus how they see the nation’s overall health reveals a striking gap. When asked how they would describe their current eating habits compared with five years ago, most UK adults feel they are eating better today, but do not extend this same optimism to UK health as a whole.

- ★ **Only 3% of UK adults give themselves a 10 out of 10 and describe their diet today as “very healthy.”** Despite increased access to food-related content and greater choice, few feel they are truly succeeding. Health remains aspirational rather than achievable.
- ★ **23% of adults give themselves a 7 out of 10.** This reflects comfort without confidence — people feel “okay” but acknowledge shortcomings. For advertisers, it highlights the appetite for encouragement, not judgement.
- ★ **Older adults tend to feel more confident about what they’re eating.** Over 55s are more likely (59%) to rate their diets as ‘very healthy’ compared to younger (18-24) (42%) demographics.
- ★ **Regional differences show inequality.** Londoners are more likely to call their diets very healthy (5%) compared with 2% in the North and just 1% in Scotland and Wales, perhaps reflecting the greater diversity of options in the capital.
- ★ **Just over half (53%) of UK adults believe they’re eating more healthily than they were five years ago.** Growing awareness of health and wellbeing, product choice, and trends like reduced meat consumption contribute to this self-assessment.
- ★ **Only 10% say they eat less healthily today than they used to.** For these consumers, cost, convenience, and confusion over the best choices remain the biggest barriers to success, despite knowing what “better” looks like.
- ★ **Just 16% of adults believe that the UK is, on the whole, healthier than ten years ago.** So while individuals report progress themselves, most feel that the health of the nation overall has declined. This reflects both scepticism and fatigue.

The disconnect between personal optimism and national decline is a revealing insight. For advertisers, the lesson is to focus on progress rather than perfection, celebrating small, meaningful wins without overstating collective outcomes.

## Then vs now: a snapshot timeline

### THEN

- Behaviour: Meat-heavy diets dominated; sustainability was niche
- Behaviour: Advice came mainly from family, cookbooks, or traditional media
- Perception: People rated themselves moderately healthy
- Perception: The national conversation on health was quieter, less collective



### NOW

- Behaviour: 25% eat less meat; 22% eat more sustainably
- Behaviour: Influence comes from social media and cultural interest
- Perception: Only 3% call their diet very healthy; most rate themselves 7/10
- Perception: Only 16% believe the UK is healthier than ten years ago



### Progress, not perfection

The story of “then vs now” is not straightforward improvement, but a mix of personal optimism and collective tiredness. For brands and advertisers, it’s time to tap into nostalgia and fatigue, focusing on familiar foods and routines that resonate but need reframing as lighter or healthier to feel relevant. Offer progress, not perfection. Consumers value small, manageable steps more than idealised visions of health.



# 5. Barriers to Healthy Eating

**It's not just that we don't know how to be healthier. It's that we can't.**

People are making efforts to eat better. More are cutting back on meat, paying attention to protein and fibre, and experimenting with new ways of cooking. On the surface, this suggests progress. Yet the national picture looks less encouraging: few believe the country as a whole is healthier than it was a decade ago.

**WHY THE GAP?**



**The issue is not a lack of awareness.**

With social media influencers, greater requirements for food labelling, and a rise in food-related media, knowledge has never been more accessible. In fact, just 7% of UK adults say that not knowing what's healthy stops them from eating better. It's important to note here that information from influencers is not always accurate and there is a lot of misinformation out there, especially now MAHA is gaining traction worldwide.

The reality is that many consumers face barriers that go beyond information.

It's not that we don't know how to eat well, it's that we can't. For advertisers and brand partners, this reveals an important truth: campaigns built on education alone will fall flat unless they also address the real-life barriers; the realities that keep people from acting on what they already know.



## What's Holding Us Back?

“ I just love my food  
— after the healthy stuff,  
I tuck into the treats. ”

One third of UK adults are trying to eat more protein and fibre, and many more are making a conscious effort to improve their diets. Yet a lot fall short. The barriers are often not about ignorance but about context: cost, convenience, willpower, access, and support. Each represents both a challenge and an opportunity for brands.



**Cost is the biggest barrier**, with 37% frustrated at food pricing. Healthy eating often comes with a price tag, and one in five parents who have children aged 18 or under have cut back on the amount of food they buy for their families because of rising costs. 18% have opted for cheaper, less nutritious alternatives. Fresh produce, lean protein, and fortified products can feel out of reach compared to calorie-dense processed foods. .

Planning a few meat-free days can help to lower the cost of each meal, while adding beans and lentils can stretch out meals such as [chilli con carne](#) or [bolognese](#), with the extras being used for lunch the next day.


For families juggling bills, the weekly shop becomes a balancing act between quantity and quality. For advertisers, this signals a need to show how products can stretch budgets further, whether through sharing recipe inspiration (foodie influencers are a great way to get the word out, here!), low cost swap suggestions, or multi-use ingredients that deliver value.



**Personal taste preferences** are cited as a barrier by 30% of UK adults. Sometimes the challenge is not external but internal. Many people simply enjoy foods that are high in sugar, salt, or fat. A sweet tooth, cultural traditions, and the emotional pull of comfort foods all make unhealthy choices appealing, even when the intention to eat well is strong. .





For brands, this highlights the importance of flavour-led messaging. Bold Beans are a great example of a brand doing this well. They changed the name of the liquid around their beans to 'bean stock' and immediately made it a palatable addition to dishes. Healthy options need to be framed not as sacrifices but as indulgent, tasty, and satisfying — otherwise they will always be competing with cake on the consumer's terms.

 **29% experience a lack of motivation to eat better.** Knowing what to do is different from finding the drive to do it. The day-to-day pressures of work, family, and fatigue can zap energy and willpower. Without consistent reinforcement or visible short-term benefits, motivation wanes, leaving good intentions unmet.

Advertisers can make an impact by recognising that motivation is contextual, not absolute. Campaigns that empathise with tiredness or stress and offer 'easy wins' from quick snack fixes to ready-to-use shortcuts will resonate more than perfect lifestyles.

 **Contradictory advice and lack of support** continue to be a problem. Over a quarter of UK adults (26%) feel that nutrition advice often feels confusing or overwhelming. One in five (21%) do not know which sources to trust and nearly a quarter (24%) say they would welcome clearer, more straightforward guidance. .

 Among younger groups, this problem is especially acute: 14% of 18–24 year olds say they struggle to judge which foods are “good” or “bad.” Mixed messages erode confidence and leave people unsure of how to apply healthy eating principles in practice.

 Here, brands can play a role as trusted guides. The more straightforward, transparent, and consistent the message, the more credibility a brand builds. Clarity is a competitive advantage in a world where people feel overwhelmed and unable to cut through the noise.

**Confusion around health and nutrition isn't just a consumer problem — it's also an opportunity. People are actively looking for clearer, more consistent voices they can trust. That's where Good Health comes in.**



### **Good Health: clarity in a crowded wellness space**

Good Health is Good Food's new health-focused platform, created to meet a clear need for trustworthy, practical advice. With audiences increasingly overwhelmed by conflicting messages, Good Health offers straight-talking, evidence-based content across wellbeing, fitness, nutrition and everyday health. It's designed to make complex topics simple and actionable — positioning Good Food as a trusted guide and giving brand partners an authoritative environment to reach highly engaged health-conscious consumers.

<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/health>

Social : <https://www.instagram.com/goodhealthbygoodfood/> <https://www.tiktok.com/@goodfood>



**Convenience is a growing obstacle** for younger people. 40% of 18 - 24 year olds say healthy food is too inconvenient, compared with just 19% of over-55s. For younger people juggling studies, work, and hectic social lives, time pressure makes quick snacks and takeaways more appealing than meal prep. This makes convenience one of the strongest levers for brands to pull: showing how healthy eating can be integrated into a busy lifestyle.



**Only 20% say they face no barriers when it comes to healthy eating.** For the vast majority, at least one factor, such as cost, taste, time, or support, is standing in the way of following a healthy diet.



**For advertisers, this is the key insight:** almost everyone has something blocking their path, which means that almost everyone could benefit from a form of support that reduces friction.

The data makes clear that healthy eating is less about knowing and more about being able. Structural barriers create friction, meaning even those who are motivated often struggle to sustain change. For brands, leaning into these barriers rather than ignoring them is the clearest way to connect with consumer reality.



# 6 Practical Tips That You Can Use to Save Extra Pounds & Pennies



By Lauren Leyva - <https://www.instagram.com/laurenleyva/?hl=en>

When cooking becomes enjoyable (rather than stressful), we're more likely to cook from scratch and avoid more expensive convenience foods. It's definitely not about being perfect, but about making healthy eating on a budget more doable!

## 1. Cheap cuts of meat

Often underrated, there is a fab selection of lower cost meats that you can choose to create wholesome, filling dishes. For example, chicken thighs & drumsticks, pork shoulder or beef shin.

## 2. Bulk out with beans & pulses

Ingredients such as lentils, butter beans, cannellini beans, chickpeas and split peas are very low cost and widely accessible. Bulking out your meat dishes to stretch your money further; for example, bulk out a Shepherd's Pie with a tin of kidney beans or bulk out a chicken curry with a tin of creamy butter beans. You can buy them dried or tinned which both last a long time, so great for value-for-money bulk buying.

## 3. Write a Meal Plan & Shopping List

A solid meal plan and shopping list is an unexpected way to save money, but works every time. By planning in advance, you're less likely to impulse buy and add unnecessary, random items to your shopping trolley.

## 4. Compare price per 100g

A common mistake is to look at the main price. Whilst shopping, look at the "price per 100g" or "price per unit", usually just below the large price on the label. This is a much better way to compare the cost of different products and will show you if an item is genuinely better value than another.

## 5. Upgrade your Leftovers

A great way to stretch out your leftovers is to upgrade them with just a few ingredients to create a new dish that goes further. For example, buy some pastry and transform a casserole into a pie, or use leftover soup for a pasta sauce!

## 6. Smaller portions to avoid waste

A simple way to both avoid food waste and therefore to avoid wasting money is to serve slightly smaller portions. Lots of us are sometimes guilty of throwing away the remains of a meal into the bin as we couldn't finish the meal. By serving smaller portions, you can always have seconds, but you're less likely to throw scraps in the bin, therefore avoiding waste and stretching your meals further.

## Cutting Through the Noise: Cook Smart

Brands have a critical role to play in helping consumers overcome their barriers. The [Good Food Cook Smart campaign](#) is one example of practical intervention, tackling cost, waste, and convenience in ways that resonate with everyday realities.

“

“Every penny counts and [Cook Smart](#) is here to help you get the most out of your ingredients, without compromising on flavour. So, whether it’s reinventing your leftovers, getting advice on how to organise your kitchen, or learning new techniques, Cook Smart ensures that delicious meals don’t have to cost the earth. ”





[Cook Smart](#) is an ongoing campaign that focuses on solutions that directly address consumer pain points: bulk sources of protein such as [beans](#) and pulses, affordable lunch ideas to reduce reliance on expensive cafés, [batch cooking](#) and [zero-waste recipes](#), and time-saving scratch cooking tips for busy weeknights. The campaign prioritises open and transparent guidance from dietary professionals and food experts, which helps build trust at a time when conflicting advice often leaves people confused.


For advertisers, the lesson is clear: campaigns that address and tackle common barriers head-on feel more authentic and more useful. By providing not just products but also actionable, accessible ideas and guidance, brands can show consumers that healthier eating is within their reach, even in a difficult economic climate.





## Who Faces the Greatest Barriers?

 **Confusion is highest among younger people.** 14% of 18–24 year olds feel unsure about what's healthy, compared to a much lower 9% of 25–34s, 7% of 35–44s, and just 5% of over-45s. Brands looking to reach Gen Z must understand that clarity and reassurance are as important as inspiration.

 **Access is a greater issue for Londoners.** 15% cite poor access to healthy options; nearly double the 8% across England overall. In crowded urban markets, availability and placement matter as much as messaging.

 **Time is scarce for workers and students especially.** Almost a third of workers (32%) and 35% of students struggle to find the time to eat healthily, compared to just 3% of retirees. Here, convenience-focused solutions such as meal kits, ready-to-go options, or five-minute recipe ideas have particular relevance.

 **Cost pressures are sharpest for students and the unemployed.** Around half of all people in these groups cite healthy food as unaffordable, compared to 37% of those in employment. Communicating affordability, value, and versatility is key when communicating with and supporting these audiences.

 **Parents with more children often feel squeezed.** 40% of parents with three or more children living at home say they lack time for healthy eating, compared to 31% with one child at home, and just 18% with no children in the house.

Cost is also a bigger issue for parents, with 58% of larger families citing it as a barrier versus 34% without children. Campaigns that show [family-friendly bulk cooking](#), low-cost swaps, and [kid-approved meals](#) will strike a stronger chord.

These splits show that barriers are not universal. Age, location, life stage, and family structure all shape how consumers experience obstacles to healthy eating. Advertisers must recognise that 'one-size-fits-all' solutions will not resonate.



## The iceberg of barriers

Above the water, consumers cite surface-level excuses for not following a healthy diet. These are broad obstacles that are generally easy to fix. Below the water, the deeper structural causes to healthy eating are harder to see but far more powerful.

### ABOVE THE WATER

(surface excuses)

- “I don’t have the time to cook from scratch.”
- “Healthy food is too inconvenient when I’m busy.”
- “I just like treats too much to give them up.”
- “Motivation is hard to keep up after a long day.”

### BELOW THE WATER

(deeper causes)

- Rising food costs make healthier options unaffordable for many families.
- Limited access to healthy food choices in some regions.
- Confusion caused by contradictory advice and unclear labelling.
- Pressures of work, study, and childcare reduce both time and energy.



The iceberg highlights why education alone cannot solve the problem. The deeper causes demand solutions that address affordability, access, and clarity, not just personal willpower. For brands, this means campaigns should look beneath the surface excuses, designing and introducing smart solutions that help consumers overcome the deep set structural barriers that are shaping their everyday lives. Location-specific messaging, offers and campaigns can also help to bridge the gap.

The role of brands is to make healthier eating possible in everyday contexts: affordable enough for families, quick enough for students, and appealing enough to rival less nutritious options.

By showing empathy for the pressures people face and celebrating achievable steps, advertisers can connect more deeply with their audiences. Progress, not perfection, is the story that resonates, and the opportunity for brands lies in becoming the partner that makes progress feel within reach.



# 6. The Real Modern British Diet

## Tracked, tired, and ultra-processed

When most people picture a 'healthy diet', the image in their minds is simple: a bowl of fruit and yoghurt, protein-packed snack bars, home-cooked meals, and the occasional treat. Yet the reality of what modern Brits are eating looks remarkably different from this ideal.

Advertising, online recipe videos, and packaging claims nudge shoppers towards foods that look and sound healthy – “high protein”, “wholegrain”, “no added sugar” – even when the overall formulation leans heavily on refined ingredients.

The health-halo effect is powerful; a cereal bar with oats front-of-pack feels virtuous, even if most of the bar is syrup and flavourings. Social feeds amplify this: quick POV cooking clips make 'healthy' feel effortless, but rarely show the batch-shop, prep, and washing-up that underpin a consistently better diet.

Britons are more health-conscious than ever, continually tracking foods using mobile apps, counting calories, or experimenting with diets and habits such as intermittent fasting and intuitive eating. At the same time, many admit they feel exhausted by the effort of trying to make the right choices. And while healthy eating is the aspiration, ultra-processed foods (UPFs) remain a staple of daily life in the UK today.

There's a subtle but important difference between knowing and doing. People have absorbed the headlines, but we live in a food environment engineered for speed and repeatability: long shelf life, consistent taste, single-hand snacks, microwave-to-table meals. Add modern life friction with shift work, long commutes for some, back-to-back calls for others, and the diet that actually happens is the one that fits into those constraints.

Almost a quarter of UK adults would rate themselves 7/10 on the healthy eating scale, where 1 is very unhealthy and 10 is very healthy. The self-perception is optimistic – but is it accurate? Beneath the surface, it seems the real modern British diet is defined as much by convenience and stress as it is by aspiration and effort.



## Expectation vs reality

The awareness–action gap is particularly visible when it comes to ultra-processed foods (UPFs). UPFs are foods that have been industrially formulated with synthetic additives such as sweeteners, colourings, preservatives, or emulsifiers. They are more likely to be high in salt, sugar, or saturated fats, and low in fibre.

A growing body of research links high UPF intake to obesity, cancer, and depression. Yet because some UPFs, like fortified cereals or instant soups, do provide useful nutrients, consumers are understandably confused.

**Only 3% of UK adults say they rely on UPFs for breakfast.** Yet when you include most cereals, white bread, flavoured yoghurts and many breakfast bars, the true picture is likely to be very different. Morning meals are framed as “healthy starts” in advertising, with labels such as “high in fibre” or “source of protein.” But the addition of sugars, stabilisers, and flavourings still places many of these foods firmly in the UPF category. People are eating UPFs without even realising it.

**Similarly, only 5% say they rely on UPFs for lunch,** even though pre-packaged sandwiches and wraps are among some of the most popular midday food choices. These products are typically marketed as fresh and balanced, which allows them to escape the “processed” label in consumers’ minds, even when the bread, fillings, sauces, and sides are still heavily processed.

For advertisers, this highlights a perception blind spot. If people underestimate their UPF intake, they will not change their behaviour. Brands that are transparent about processing, and that are able to reformulate quick “go to” foods without losing the appeal of familiarity, can help bridge this gap.

**14% of UK adults never plan their lunch in advance,** which makes “grab-and-go” options the default. This behaviour is not simply about laziness — it reflects the realities of busy schedules, commuting, or working irregular hours. Lunch becomes a functional stopgap rather than a carefully considered meal. Yet over time, these small, reactive choices accumulate into a diet that leans heavily on processed breads, bars, and crisps. The perception remains that this is “better than nothing,” or even that it qualifies as healthy because it looks balanced on the surface.



The brand opportunity lies in reframing convenient options, for example, by showing how a quick wrap can be easy and less processed, while still meeting the same need for speed.

**35% of UK adults say they try to avoid UPFs where possible**, yet 13% admit they do favour them when they're feeling busy or **stressed**. This contradiction is revealing because it shows that people know what they want to avoid but cannot sustain that intention in real-life conditions. Long hours, emotional fatigue, and financial pressures all push them back towards the same foods they had hoped to resist. People are not short of knowledge, information, or education.

They are short of time, energy, and accessible alternatives.

**With 22% of adults regularly feeling anxious or on edge**, emotional eating plays a significant role in shaping the modern British diet. Food provides immediate sensory comfort: creaminess, crunch, salt, sweetness, warmth. UPFs are designed to deliver these sensations quickly and reliably, which is why they win out in moments of stress.

The majority of consumers prefer the taste of non-UPFs, but when anxiety spikes, it is the engineered hit of a chocolate bar, packet of crisps, or takeaway pizza that delivers comfort. Advertisers who ignore this emotional pull risk sounding out of touch. By acknowledging food as both nourishment and comfort, and offering alternatives that satisfy the same cravings, brands can position themselves as allies rather than critics.

**When Britons need an energy boost, one third turn to chocolate or sweets**, 18% to snack bars (often high in sugar despite health claims), and 17% to crisps or other savoury processed snacks. Snacking is no longer an occasional indulgence; it is a structural part of the diet. This matters because snacks are disproportionately processed.

While main meals may still feature fresh or minimally processed components, snacks are dominated by convenience products. For some brands, the challenge is not to remove snacks from people's lives but to redesign them. Healthier options must be craveable, portable, and as affordable as less healthier options if they are to succeed.

**Working routines and environments have changed**, and one in five adults who are employed say they snack more when working from home. Hybrid working has blurred the boundary between meals and grazing. While these snacks feel trivial, they add up, increasing reliance on processed options within arm's reach. For brands, this creates a new context to engage with: the home office. Products positioned as "work-friendly" snacks – quick, neat, sustaining – can meet this moment, especially if they feel more wholesome.

**Plant-based eating carries strong associations with health**, but not all vegan foods are created equal. Among full-time students, 16% identify as vegan, and in London the figure is a significant 13%. Yet many of the most popular substitutes, including plant-based burgers and cheeses are packed with colourants, and artificial flavourings designed to mimic meat and dairy. They are ultra-processed in every sense. The risk for brands is credibility.

Consumers expect plant-based products to be healthier by default, and discovering that they are not can damage trust. By reformulating towards simpler, whole-food recipes and being transparent about processing, brands can align plant-based eating with consumer expectations.

**More than one in five adults (22%) say it is difficult to know which foods are ultra-processed.** This uncertainty is amplified by mixed messages: some products are marketed as wholesome despite being processed, while others are demonised unfairly. If consumers cannot identify UPFs with confidence, they cannot act consistently.

Clarity is a differentiator. Plain-language ingredient lists, simple icons, and education campaigns can demystify the space. Reformulation – removing unnecessary additives, reducing sugar and salt, shortening ingredient lists – is another way to build trust and help people feel that their choices align with their intentions.

In short, the modern British diet is shaped by contradictions. People want to eat well, but stress, shifting routines, and “health halos” around certain products keep them tethered to UPFs more than they realise, resulting in diets that aren’t especially good.



## Diet trends: Tracking Without Transformation

Experimentation with diet structures is now relatively common across Britain. In the last two years, intermittent fasting, calorie counting, and intuitive eating have all gained traction. These approaches are intended to help people control intake, but they often fail to address the underlying health and quality of foods consumed.

**11% of UK adults have tried [intermittent fasting](#)**, 14% calorie counting or tracking, and 12% [intuitive eating](#). The figures reflect a population actively searching for solutions. People are motivated, curious, and willing to experiment.

For advertisers, the takeaway is that calorie counting, and diet fads are no longer fresh territory. Campaigns that focus instead on food quality, simplicity, and sustainability resonate more strongly than those centred on numbers or restrictions.

### Small swaps

What's good for each of us is very personal, but [making a few intentional swaps](#) can boost the feel good factor in many of our everyday dishes. It's also very easy to do!

## SWAP FROM SOME OF THESE...

- Breakfast: Sweetened cereal with flavoured yoghurt and white toast
- Mid-morning snack: Chocolate bar with a can of energy drink
- Lunch: Pre-packaged sandwich, packet of crisps, fizzy drink
- Dinner: Frozen pizza with garlic bread
- Evening snack: Microwave popcorn and biscuits
- Drinks: Multiple cups of instant coffee, sugary fizzy drinks

## TO SOME OF THESE...

- Breakfast: [Porridge bowl](#) with fresh fruit and semi-skimmed milk
- Mid-morning snack: Handful of nuts with sparkling water
- Lunch: [Homemade wrap](#) with beans, salad, and wholegrain bread
- Dinner: [Stir-fry](#) with lean chicken, vegetables, and brown rice
- Evening snack: Plain yoghurt with honey and berries
- Drinks: Tea, water, one coffee in the morning



The contrast shows how **simple swaps**, such as switching beans for pre-packaged meats, water for fizzy drinks, wholegrains for white bread can reduce reliance on UPFs without requiring a complete lifestyle overhaul, making a healthy diet within easy reach.

The real modern British diet is tracked but tiring, health-minded yet ultra-processed. Consumers are putting in the effort, but their outcomes are constrained by stress, habit and confusion.

For brands, the opportunity is to bridge the perception–reality gap. That means reformulating products to reduce reliance on additives, educating people about processing in plain language, and acknowledging the reality of modern eating habits, from biscuits at the desk to plant-based convenience foods.

By being transparent, relatable, and practical, brands can help consumers feel that their choices are healthier, more achievable, and more real. The opportunity is not to demand perfection but to celebrate progress one small swap, one better snack, and one simplified label at a time.



# 7. Eating by Generation

## Gen Z smoothies and Boomer toast

Eating habits have always reflected more than just hunger. They are tied to culture, identity, and the values of the times in which people grow up. In Britain today, the dietary differences between generations are striking. While older adults lean on [planning](#) and traditions, younger people are embracing greater food experimentation, influenced by social media, and often more willing to treat diet as a powerful tool for mental and physical optimisation.

These differences extend beyond the plate. They shape how people feel in terms of both energy and mood, they impact perceptions and opinions about new health trends like weight loss injectables, and they impact where individuals turn to for health related advice. Younger generations are more likely to describe themselves as 'very healthy', but the reality is more complex: each age group faces unique pressures that influence what they eat, how they eat, and how they define health.

### Differences in food values, energy, and mood

One of the clearest generational divides lies in the values attached to food. For some, mealtimes are an anchor point in the day; a chance to connect and share. For others, they are a functional necessity squeezed into already busy schedules.

These differences in value shape not only how people eat but also how they feel in terms of energy, digestive comfort, and mood.

Research suggests that younger people are more likely to treat food as part of their overall health toolkit, while older people often approach meals as a matter of consistency and nourishment.

**Vegetables remain a sticking point for younger eaters.** Around 21% of parents who have children 18 or under claim their children avoid most vegetables, and these patterns often persist into adulthood. Generations raised on traditional meals - the classic 'meat and two veg' - may be more accustomed to eating what was put on the table, whereas today's parents face far more resistance – a battle that spills over into adult diets when children grow up with limited exposure to varied foods.

**Parents often prioritise children's meals over their own.** 28% of parents put more effort into their children's meals than those for themselves. This points to a generation caught between the traditional ideals of nutrition and the growing pressures of time and money. Many parents spend evenings preparing healthy meals for their children, but when it comes to themselves, they often grab leftovers or rely on convenience. Over one in ten openly admit to eating their children's leftovers rather than making a separate meal.



**Older generations are stronger meal planners.** Almost half of over-55s plan their breakfast daily, compared with less than one in three (28%) of 18 - 24s. This difference extends to lunch and dinner, highlighting how older adults hold onto routines, while younger adults often take a more ad hoc approach to eating. This contrast reflects not only generational attitudes but also different lifestyles: retirees or semi-retirees typically demonstrate more stable routines, while younger adults face unpredictable schedules and shifting priorities.

**Energy and mood differ by age.** 31% of 18-24s regularly feel low on energy compared with just 17% of over-55s. Younger adults also report more bloating and digestive discomfort, and are far more likely to draw a link between what they eat and how they feel.

Among older adults, only 8% make that same connection. This suggests that while younger groups may be more health-aware, they are also more vulnerable than older individuals to the emotional and physical consequences of poor diets or irregular eating.



**Younger generations adapt diets for mental health.** **Mental health** is a relatively new part of the public health conversation, and is certainly more prominent than it was 50 years ago. Younger adults today are far more willing to experiment with their diets in an active effort to boost mood and improve mental health, highlighting how the concept of wellbeing has expanded beyond physical fitness to include emotional balance. For older adults, this link is less clear — many still approach food primarily as physical sustenance.

**Different hunger rhythms highlight lifestyle contrasts.** 40% of younger adults report that they sometimes **wake up feeling hungry**, compared with just 9% of over-55s. Yet despite this, older individuals are more likely to eat their last meal of the day earlier than younger generations. This difference may be linked to age-related shifts in metabolic patterns, but could be tied to the types of foods eaten, with older adults opting for nutrients more likely to sustain.





## Exploring broader health preferences

Food is only one part of how different generations approach health. The wider landscape — from meal replacements to medical choices — also reflect notable shifts. Younger people are embracing experimental diets, alternative approaches to eating, and even medical interventions, while older generations typically remain attached to traditional concepts of balance, moderation, and gradual change.



**Weight loss drugs spark divided opinions.** On the whole, 27% of Brits do not agree with the use of weight loss drugs, showing that scepticism is still strong. However, 12% of 45 - 54 year olds have considered using them. For this group, the pressure to juggle careers, family, and health may explain the willingness to experiment.



**Diet frameworks split by age.** The [Mediterranean diet](#) has gained the most traction among over-55s (15%). By contrast, younger adults are more drawn to high-protein diets, often popularised by fitness culture. These trendier diets reflect a desire for control and faster visible results, contrasting with the steadier traditions often displayed by older adults.



**The preference for following structured diets decline with age.** Stricter approaches like calorie counting and veganism are far more common among younger people. Older adults are less likely to embrace rigid dietary structures, preferring balance and routine over trends and restriction.

## WHY THE DIVIDE?

Generational divides in health and diet don't emerge by chance. They are shaped by the influences and environments people grow up in — from the education they receive and the approach of their parents or guardians to the technology they have access to and affordability.

Younger generations live in a world of abundant choice, conflicting information, and digital exposure, while older generations draw from cultural traditions and habits formed in a simpler, less connected time.



# The Impact of Social Media On Eating Habits


By Emily Knox - Head of Organic Social at Immediate


The influence of social media on the eating habits of Gen Z is undeniable – it shapes the products they buy, the foods they cook, and their aspirations around lifestyle and wellness. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram have propelled trends such as Dubai chocolate and baked feta pasta into global phenomena overnight. These micro-moments of influence indicate that digital culture now dictates kitchen choices more powerfully than family traditions.


Social media has unlocked a world of playful experimentation, novelty and fun, leading to endless mashups and visually enticing, newsfeed-ready creations.


However, there is another side to the trend. Many (myself included) have attempted viral TikTok recipes, only to find that my 'two-ingredient healthy chocolate mousse' falls short of the original creator's results. And what of the lifestyle and health creators who inspire such efforts?: 44% of health videos on TikTok contain non-factual information.




Amid this information overload, the challenge for brands is to cut through the noise with clarity, leveraging trusted creators to instil consumer confidence. While inspiration sparks action, only credibility ensures genuine, long-term behaviour change.

 **Social media drives food choices for younger individuals.** Platforms such as [TikTok](#), [Instagram](#), and online forums like [Reddit](#) are a key source of food and health advice for under-35s. These audiences are also more likely to change their eating habits in response to influencer content, while older groups tend to lean more towards healthcare professionals, government or NHS websites, [YouTube](#), and [blogs](#).

 **Younger parents under 34 are more likely to change their children's diets** based on online advice than older parents (15%). This reflects a culture of digital-first parenting, where social media often replaces traditional family wisdom.

 **A quarter of parents in Britain say feeding their children a balanced diet is easy**, while almost the same number feel it's difficult. This highlights that there's no 'standard' when it comes to feeding the family. Some children grow up with balanced, home-cooked meals, while others rely heavily on convenience – and those habits can often carry through into adulthood.

 **Convenience wins for many families.** 19% of parents admit to relying on pre-packaged snacks – even though they're usually not the most nutritious – when out of the house. This reflects the reality of modern parenting: even when ideals are high, time pressures push people towards convenience.

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**Knowledge gaps differ by age.** 14% of 18–24s struggle to judge 'good' and 'bad' foods, compared with just 5% of over-55s. Older generations often benefited from a greater focus on practical cooking lessons in school and clearer messaging about food, while younger people have grown up in a world of conflicting dietary advice, 'health halos', and marketing spins.
- 
**Access to healthy food is harder for the young.** 21% of 18–24s cite access to healthy food as a barrier to better eating, compared with just 4% of over-55s. Younger adults, particularly in urban centres, may face greater challenges in terms of both cost and time. By contrast, older adults often have more stability, both financially and in lifestyle, allowing them easier access.
- 
**AI highlights digital divides.** 10% of 18–24s and 12% of 25–34s have used artificial intelligence for recipe or meal inspiration. This is in contrast to just 1% of over-55s. This difference underlines a generational split between those happy to try digital solutions and those who view them as unnecessary or untrustworthy.

## GENERATIONAL FOOD MOODS

Theme	Younger Adults	Older Adults
Energy Boost	Energy drinks	Tea/coffee
Eating Patterns	Breakfast, lunch & dinner plus additional meals	Traditional three meals per day
Cooking Habits	Mix of home cooking & takeaways	Home-cooked foods using fresh/cupboard ingredients
Meat Consumption	Risen amongst young men	Reduced for health reasons
Ultra-Processed Foods	Quick fixes	Largely avoid



The generational divide in eating amongst modern Brits is clear: younger adults tend to lean more into experimentation, shaped by digital influence, and convenience, while older adults rely on planning, stability, and tradition. Yet these divides are not about superiority — they are about context. Each generation faces different pressures, from affordability and time to social expectations and cultural trends.

For advertisers, the lesson is simple: tailor tone and platform by generation, without resorting to stereotypes. Younger audiences respond to authenticity, influencers, and convenience; older audiences want reassurance, clarity, and connection to tradition. Campaigns that acknowledge shifting priorities while meeting people where they are will triumph over those that present a one-size-fits-all vision of health.





# 8. The Rise of Planned Eating

## Control is the new craving

Not all that long ago, British diets were ruled by cravings. A mid-afternoon slump meant grabbing the nearest chocolate bar, and a need for salt was swiftly satisfied by a packet of crisps or a tub of nuts. Convenience ruled, and spontaneity was all part of the appeal. But all that's beginning to change with a rise in planned eating.

Today, control is the new craving. A growing number of people are deliberately planning and preparing their meals in advance rather than relying on impulse decisions. The shift reflects deeper changes in how people think about health and behaviour. Planning has become a wellness practice in itself; a way to exert control over energy levels, calorie intake, spending, and even emotional wellbeing.

This shift is significant. While 33% of Britons still admit to reaching for the chocolate when they need an energy boost, only 7% say they never plan their dinner ahead of time. Meal planning is helping people overcome barriers such as time, cost, and most notably the effort required to make healthy food when it's needed - a barrier that 70% of 18-24-year-olds cite as one of their biggest challenges. For advertisers and brands, this opens up a huge opportunity: tools, recipes, and services that support planning are no longer niche; they are essential wellness solutions.

### Who plans meals and why?

Meal planning is now a regular part of daily life for many households. People plan meals for different reasons, from managing health goals and saving money to reducing food waste and regaining a sense of control over their time. But the level of planning, and the motivations behind it, vary widely across demographics.



**Daily planning is becoming routine.** Around one third of Brits now say that they plan their breakfast and lunch every day of the week, and a larger 42% plan their dinner each day, too. Dinner remains the most structured meal, perhaps because it's more likely to involve the whole household and fresh ingredients.



**Retirees are the most consistent planners.** More retirees plan their dinners daily than any other group, likely reflecting their greater availability of time. Full time students and workers with less free time are least likely to plan meals, yet 39% of these groups still say they manage to plan their dinner each day, showing that planning is possible even for those with busy schedules.



- Lunch planning is mixed.** Students are the least likely to plan ahead (26%), whereas 35% of retirees and 30% of employees plan their lunches daily. This is a crucial insight for brands: lunchtime solutions that make planning easier - for example, pre-prepped kits, ready-to-assemble options, or AI-led planning tools - have strong potential.
- Larger families plan more often or every day.** Families with three or more children living at home are most likely to plan lunches (34%) and dinners (45%). For these households, planning is a necessity, helping manage cost of living challenges, busy schedules, and different dietary preferences of various family members.
- Planning supports calorie control.** Almost half (43%) of 18–34-year-olds have tried calorie counting, and nearly a quarter of Brits say they often think about their calorie intake. Meal planning fits naturally into this approach, allowing people to design meals ahead of time that stay within their daily nutritional limits.
- AI is reshaping planning.** Younger people are beginning to integrate AI into meal planning, with almost 10% of 18–34s saying they use it. While no over-55s report using AI for this purpose yet, its potential to simplify decision-making is clear, showing opportunities for tech-driven solutions to grow this behaviour.
- Waste reduction** is a key motivator. More than half of Brits plan meals to use up ingredients they already have in the house, reducing waste. Women are especially likely to do this, aligning with the fact that they are also more likely than men to make sustainable food choices with the planet in mind.
- Planning helps with budgeting.** With the cost of healthy food a significant barrier to healthy eating - especially for families (58% of those with three or more children report feeling the strain) - meal planning is becoming a financial strategy as much as a dietary one. It allows households to buy in bulk, make use of leftovers, and avoid costly impulse purchases.

Planning is not just a food habit; it's a lifestyle choice. Brands that offer planning tools, recipe platforms, or AI meal builders are tapping into a behaviour that is now central to how consumers approach food and think about their own health.

## Correlation with mood and energy

The benefits of planned eating extend beyond the kitchen. There is growing evidence that meal planning has a positive impact on energy, mood, and even mental health - not because of the food itself, but for the sense of control it brings.

- ★ **Planning aligns with consistent energy levels.** Retirees - the group most likely to plan their meals - also report the most stable energy levels. They are least likely to experience energy fluctuations throughout the day, as well as being the least likely to feel tired or drained. This suggests that carefully planning and preparing nutritious meals could help maintain energy through the day.
- ★ **Control reduces stress.** Retirees, who plan their meals most consistently, are also the least likely to report periods of feeling low, anxious, or on edge. Meal planning appears to create a sense of structure and predictability, creating a psychological benefit that spontaneity and "winging it" often lacks.
- ★ **Quick fixes fuel crashes.** Students and workers, who are less likely to plan ahead, often report lower energy and more frequent mood fluctuations. This may be linked to reliance on quick, processed foods that deliver fast energy followed by a crash; a pattern that planned meals can often help avoid.

Planning isn't just about food; it's about how people feel in themselves, and about themselves. Brands that position planning as a tool for balanced energy and improved mood can connect with deeper consumer motivations around wellbeing.



### The Good Food App: making planning practical

The Good Food app is designed to meet people where they are in their planning journey. It offers seven-day meal plans tailored to different tastes and dietary needs, as well as recipe inspiration that makes meal prep easier and more enjoyable. Its features help users budget more effectively, batch cook to save time, and make the most of ingredients they already have at home, saving time while reducing waste.

Meal prep has never been simpler. And as control takes over to become the new craving, frictionless digital tools like the Good Food app will only grow in importance.



## 9. What This Means for Brands

### Advertising with empathy

In researching how the UK really eats, one picture has come into sharp focus: Britain's relationship with food is complicated, layered with good intentions, emotional undercurrents, practical barriers, and competing priorities.

Britain is a nation running on empty, craving more energy and balance in day to day life, and yet often too busy, stressed, or confused to achieve it. Thanks to social media, influencers, and artificial intelligence, people know more about nutrition than ever before, yet this knowledge doesn't always translate into firm understanding, or into actionable change.

Many eat more healthily than they did five years ago, yet few believe we as a nation are collectively healthier. We try to track and plan, but many still find themselves reaching for ultra-processed snacks when energy dips.

Today's choices are shaped just as much by circumstance as by willpower. Rising food costs and time pressures keep healthy eating out of reach for many, while confusion over labels and conflicting advice makes even the most motivated consumer second-guess themselves.

Meanwhile, generational differences in attitudes - from Gen Z's preference for functional food to Boomers' commitment to home cooking - highlight just how fragmented the food market has become.

And yet, there's a shared thread throughout it all: a desire for control. Across generations, people are searching for ways to take charge of their diets, whether through careful planning, calorie counting, or meal prep. They want food that fuels them without exhausting them, products that support their goals without making them feel guilty, and brands that understand the messy realities of how they eat.

## The role brands can play

The opportunity for brands lies not in telling people what they're doing wrong, but in helping them do more of what's right, and making it easier to do just that. To engage with today's consumers, brands must be ready and prepared to step into three roles that modern Brits are increasingly searching for from the food industry:

1

### The Facilitator

Consumers don't need lectures; they need tools. Whether it's recipes that use up leftovers, meal kits that fit into busy schedules, or products that are nutrient-dense and convenient, the best brands position themselves as partners in progress, not as gatekeepers of perfection. People don't want to be perfect; they want to be better.



2

### The Energy Ally

Food is no longer just about sustenance; it's about stamina, mood, and mental clarity. Brands that can authentically link their products to how people feel - helping them stay focused, avoid energy crashes, or beat the afternoon slump - will resonate far more deeply with consumers than those that focus purely on calories or macros.



3

### The Translator

Shoppers are overwhelmed by mixed messages. From the definition of "ultra-processed" to the meaning of "healthy," clarity is in short supply. Brands that speak human, strip back the jargon, and provide guidance in a simple, empathetic way can cut through the confusion and become trusted voices in the noise.



Above all, brands need to be ready to build campaigns that meet people where they are, not where they ideally "should" be. Real people eat frozen meals, rely on packaged snacks, and occasionally have cereal for dinner, and they want brands that recognise the realities of modern living and support them as they strive for more.



## Embracing opportunities

This new food landscape demands a new approach to marketing; one that's grounded in empathy, rooted in reality, and designed to support daily decisions.

Today's brands should:



**Plan campaigns around energy moments and meal decisions.** Instead of focusing messaging solely around mealtimes, brands should align with moments - the 3pm slump, the school-run snack, the late-night fridge raid, for example. Products that show up at these decision points, with messaging tailored to those micro-moments, will feel more relevant and useful.



**Use mood, not macros, as the hook.** Most people aren't counting their daily saturated fat intake, but they do care about feeling more alert, less anxious, or better rested. Campaigns that speak to these specific outcomes rather than nutritional breakdowns will connect on a deeper emotional level.



**Be an ally, not an authority.** Consumers don't want to be lectured on 'right' or 'wrong'. They want brands that champion small wins, offer practical help, and celebrate progress without judgement. That means positioning products as part of an achievable journey, not the endpoint of a 'perfect' diet.

## Brand opportunities by category

CATEGORY	OPPORTUNITY	STRATEGIC ROLE
Snacks	Develop products that offer balanced energy without heavy processing, such as high-fibre bars or savoury bites with natural protein.	Become the 'go-to' option for "energy moments" between meals.
Retail	Curate clear in-store and online signposting for healthier choices, highlighting quick, affordable meal solutions and "swap this for that" alternatives.	Act as the 'translator', cutting through confusion and clearly guiding better choices.
Supplements	Position supplements not as shortcuts but as support systems, helping to fill nutritional gaps created by busy lifestyles.	Be the ally that complements, not replaces, healthy eating.
Meal Services/Apps	Offer planning tools, meal kits, and AI-driven recommendations that reduce decision fatigue and help people feel more in control.	Empower consumers with structure, not restrictions.
Food & Drink Brands	Reformulate popular products to reduce additives or improve nutrient profiles, without sacrificing taste or convenience.	Support progress over perfection, helping people improve without the need for a full overhaul.



# FINAL THOUGHTS

The story of how Britain eats today is not one of failure; it's one of effort. People are trying. They are tracking, planning, swapping, and experimenting. But they are also exhausted, confused, and constrained by factors that are beyond their control.

For brands, the challenge - and indeed the opportunity - is to meet consumers in that space with empathy. Campaigns built around energy, mood, and support rather than perfection, performance, or guilt will not only resonate more deeply but also help to shape a healthier, more realistic food culture that drives real change.

The brands that win in this landscape will be those that stop chasing the idealised "perfect plate" and start fuelling the real British diet; the one that's busy, messy, and yet rooted in a desire to achieve more and do better, one decision at a time.

*Source for all data: YouGov*





# Methodology

This survey has been conducted using an online interview administered to members of the YouGov Plc UK panel of 2.5 million+ individuals who have agreed to take part in surveys. Emails are sent to panellists selected at random from the base sample. The e-mail invites them to take part in a survey and provides a generic survey link. Once a panel member clicks on the link they are sent to the survey that they are most required for, according to the sample definition and quotas. (The sample definition could be "GB adult population" or a subset such as "GB adult females"). Invitations to surveys don't expire and respondents can be sent to any available survey. The responding sample is weighted to the profile of the sample definition to provide a representative reporting sample. The profile is normally derived from census data or, if not available from the census, from industry accepted data.

YouGov plc makes every effort to provide representative information. All results are based on a sample and are therefore subject to statistical errors normally associated with sample-based information.

All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. The total sample size was 2116 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 23rd - 26th May 2025. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).