

Americans less likely to eat healthy than in years, poll finds



Customers eat at Hot Doug's restaurant in Chicago. (M. Spencer Green / Associated Press / October 9, 2013)

By Emily Alpert Reyes

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Even before piling their plates high on Thanksgiving, Americans have been eating worse than in previous years, according to a newly released poll of more than 150,000 adults.

Every day, Gallup and the health improvement company Healthways ask hundreds of Americans whether they ate healthy the day before. Healthy eating usually rises and falls month by month, with Americans eating a little worse in spring, better in late summer and much worse around November and December. (Shocking, we know.)

But the survey found that in every month this year, Americans said they were eating worse than during the same months in 2012.

For instance, only 63.4% of Americans surveyed this September said they were eating healthy, compared with 67.6% in September of last year.

Pollsters pointed out that the January boost in healthy eating wasn't as big as usual, and that eating well also took an unusually sharp dive in May and June. All in all, for most of this year, healthy eating has been at its lowest point since 2008, according to the Gallup-Healthways poll.

"It's exactly what I would have expected," said Valerie Ruelas, director of the Community Diabetes Initiative of USC and Children's Hospital Los Angeles.

Pollsters didn't speculate on why the American diet might be worsening, but Ruelas suggested that persisting poverty after the recession could be pushing Americans to eat badly. Census Bureau data have shown poverty levels stagnating between 2011 and 2012.

"One of the things that's really hard to compete with, as far as healthy food, are the dollar menus at fast-food restaurants.... It's affordable," she said.

In addition, produce sold in impoverished communities is often poorer quality, making it less appealing to strapped consumers, Ruelas said.

Gallup and Healthways also asked Americans about eating their fruits and vegetables: Fewer Americans said they were regularly eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables compared with last year. The only exceptions were in March and October.

<http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-americans-healthy-eating-poll-20131127,0,3205462.story#ixzz2pfg6Jyo1>