

HOW MANY YOUTH IN THE U.S ARE VEGAN? HOW MANY TEENS EAT VEGETARIAN WHEN EATING OUT?

The Vegetarian Resource Group asks in a YouGov Poll

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With Target selling almond and soy milk, Burger King carrying the Impossible Burger, and Dunkin offering Beyond Sausage, it seems there is an explosion of interest in vegan foods. However, The Vegetarian Resource Group wanted to know how many young vegans there are.

In a national survey commissioned by VRG and conducted online by YouGov, we asked the following question in 2021 of 8-17 year olds:

Which one of these best describes your eating behavior? Please choose one option.

- I never eat meat, fish, seafood, poultry (for example, chicken or turkey), dairy, or eggs.
- I never eat meat fish, seafood, or poultry (for example, chicken or turkey), but I eat dairy and/or eggs.
- I never eat meat, fish, seafood, poultry (for example, chicken or turkey), dairy, or eggs when eating out or getting takeout, but eat one or more of these foods at home.
- I never eat meat, fish, seafood, or poultry (for example chicken or turkey) when eating out or getting takeout, but eat one or more of these foods at home.
- When eating out or getting takeout, I sometimes eat meals without meat, fish, poultry (for example chicken or turkey), dairy or eggs.
- When eating out or getting takeout, I sometimes eat meals without meat, fish, or poultry (for example, chicken or turkey).
- None of these.

We considered those that never eat meat, fish, seafood, or poultry, plus those that never eat meat, fish, seafood, poultry, dairy, or eggs, as vegetarian. We classified that second category of vegetarians who don't eat dairy or eggs also as vegan. Because we use the word "never" and don't just ask if a person considers him/herself vegetarian, our numbers may be lower than others. We did not ask about honey.

More than half (53%) of youth (8-17 year olds) sometimes or always eat vegetarian meals when eating out. About one fifth (21%) of U.S. youth always or sometime eat vegan meals when eating out. Five percent of American youth are vegetarian (including vegans) all the time. One percent of females are vegan, and three percent of males are vegan. The Northeast, Midwest, South, and West, all had two percent vegan. However, as far as eating vegan meals sometimes or all the time when eating out, it was 30% for the Northeast, 15% for the Midwest, 18% for the South, and 26% for the West.*

Since 53% of youth eat at least some vegetarian meals when eating out, and two in five of those are at least sometimes eating vegan meals when dining out, this has strong implications for food companies and restaurants, with substantial incentive for producing vegan dishes.

In another question within this poll, we asked respondents' two most important reasons for food choices. The top reason by far was taste for 62% of those that at least sometimes eat vegetarian meals when dining out, and 78% of those that don't eat any vegetarian meals. Second was my health and eating healthy foods for 31% of those who ever eat vegetarian meals when dining out and 21% of those who don't eat vegetarian meals.

TOTALS

- 5% Vegetarian (including vegans) (Never eats meat, fish, seafood, or poultry).
- 2% Vegan (Never eats meat, fish, poultry, dairy, or eggs).
- 21% Sometimes or always eats vegan meals when eating out.
- 53% Sometimes or always eats vegetarian (including vegan) when eating out
- 2% Always eats vegan meals when eating out, but not at home.
- 2% Always eats vegetarian meals (not including vegan) when eating out, but not at home.
- 17% Sometimes eats vegan when eating out.
- 27% Sometimes eats vegetarian (not including vegan) when eating out.

- 49% 13-17 year olds sometimes or always eat vegetarian (including vegan) meals when eating out
- 57% 8-12 year olds sometimes or always eat vegetarian (including vegan) meals when eating out

WHEN DECIDING WHAT FOOD TO EAT, WHICH TWO OF THESE ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU? PLEASE SELECT UP TO TWO CHOICES

THOSE THAT EAT SOME OR MORE VEGAN MEALS OUT	DON'T EAT ANY VEGETARIAN OR VEGAN MEALS	
56%	78%	Taste
31%	21%	My health and eating healthy foods
18%	24%	What my parents eat
18%	23%	The price/cost
15%	3%	The environment (all of the nature that is around us such as water, plants, animals, air, and soil)
14%	25%	Convenience (how easy it is to get or prepare)
10%	1%	Ethics (what you believe is the right way to act or behave even if no one else is watching you)
10%	3%	Animal welfare (how animals are treated)
6%	1%	Religious beliefs
2%	4%	None of these

Ethics, religious beliefs, the environment, and health seem to be more important to many more of those eating vegan meals out than those who don't eat vegetarian or vegan meals.

WHAT VEGETARIAN PRODUCTS WILL AMERICAN YOUTH PURCHASE?

We asked the following additional question, which may be of interest to food companies, food services, restaurants, marketers, researchers, students, and media.

If you were looking to buy a vegetarian product, which of these would you choose? Please choose as many answers as you'd like.

MY FAVORITE VEGGIE BURGER COOKED ON THE SAME GRILL WHERE MEAT IS COOKED, IF THE GRILL IS CLEANED FIRST

15% Total
19% Northeast
14% Midwest
13% South
18% West
23% Male 8-12 years old
15% Male 13-17 years old
14% Female 8-12 years old
12% Female 13-17 years old
24% Eat some or more vegan meals when eating out

A VEGAN BURGER AT A FAST FOOD RESTAURANT (for example, Burger King, Subway, or Hardee's)

21% Total
27% Northeast
22% Midwest
18% South
22% West
29% Male 8-12 year old
19% Male 13-17 year old
17% Female 8-12 year old
21% Female 13-17 year old
30% Eat some or more vegan meals when eating out

A VEGETARIAN DISH CONTAINING LEAFY GREENS (for example broccoli, kale, or collards)

22% Total
29% Northeast
20% Midwest
20% South
24% West
26% Male, 8-12 year old
26% Male, 13-17 year old
19% Female, 8-12 year old
20% Female, 13-17 year old
29% Eat some or more vegan meals when eating out

A VEGETARIAN DISH CONTAINING WHOLE FOODS (for example, lentils, chickpeas, or rice)

22% Total
27% Northeast
21% Midwest
19% South
24% West
27% Male, 8-12 year old
26% Male, 13-17 year old
19% Female, 8-12 year old

19% Female, 13-17 year old
33% Eat some or more vegan meals when eating out

Those that eat vegan meals would select more dishes containing leafy greens and dishes with whole foods than those not choosing vegan meals. However, it should not be assumed that a vegetarian, vegan, or someone eating vegetarian meals (or not eating vegetarian meals) is automatically meeting suggestions by the USDA/USDHHS Dietary Guidelines for Americans that a healthy eating pattern includes a variety of vegetables from all of the subgroups, which includes dark green vegetables. When evaluating a vegetarian (or non-vegetarian) client's diet, a dietitian or other medical professional would specifically have to ask what is being consumed to know if all the subgroups are being included. This would also apply to the USDA/USDHHS Dietary Guidelines for Americans that said a healthy eating pattern includes legumes (beans and peas like lentils and chickpeas). Note that though many restaurants are adding plant-based meats to their menu, just as many young people would select a dish with whole foods or leafy greens. So restaurants should also think about those options. It was also interesting that 21% of total respondents said they would select a vegan burger at a fast food restaurant, while 15% picked their favorite veggie burger with the grill cleaned first.

MY FAVORITE DESSERT CONTAINING SUGAR IF I DO NOT KNOW THE TYPE OF SUGAR USED OR HOW THE SUGAR WAS MADE

27% Total
31% Eat some or more vegan meals when eating out
34% Always eats vegetarian (including vegan) when eating out

MY FAVORITE DESSERT CONTAINING SUGAR WHITENED THROUGH A PRODUCT (FILTER) MADE FROM ANIMAL BONES, BUT THE BONES ARE NOT IN THE SUGAR

10% TOTAL
13% Eat some or more vegan meals when eating out
16% Always eats vegetarian (including vegan) when eating out

It's interesting that more than twice as many would choose a dessert containing sugar if they did not know how the sugar was made versus when you ask about the sugar whitened through an animal bone filter. Also more would choose a vegan burger than when you mention the "favorite" veggie burger that was cooked on the same grill where meat is cooked (allowing for the grill being cleaned first). These differences seem to indicate to us that to meet the needs of all consumers, companies should label the sources of their ingredients so customers can make their own decisions.

A MEAT ALTERNATIVE GROWN FROM CELLS (DNA) FROM AN ANIMAL, WHICH WAS COLLECTED YEARS AGO. THIS PROCESS DOES NOT CURRENTLY INVOLVE THE RAISING OF ANIMALS

9% TOTAL
10% Male
8% Female
6% Age 13-17
12% Northeast
8% Midwest

- 6% South
- 12% West
- 15% Eat some or more vegan meals when eating out
- 3% Don't eat any vegetarian or vegan meals

Will future consumers buy a meat alternative grown from animal cell DNA? As of now, those who don't eat vegetarian or vegan meals don't seem to be ready for this (3% would buy when looking for a vegetarian product). Over twice as many of the youth population would buy a vegan burger at a fast food restaurant (21%), or vegetarian dishes with whole foods (22%) or leafy greens (22%), over the cell/DNA alternative (9%).

We also asked this question:

Which of these foods do you usually eat during the week? Please choose as many answers as you'd like.

THOSE THAT EAT SOME OR MORE VEGAN MEALS OUT	TOTAL	
73%	81%	Fruit (for example, strawberries, bananas, apples, grapes, or oranges)
65%	74%	Vegetables (for example, carrots, sweet potatoes, green beans, or corn)
64%	76%	Sweets (for example, candy, cookies, cake, pie, or soft drinks)
57%	56%	Whole grains (for example, whole grain bread, brown rice, whole wheat bread, or corn tortillas)
49%	50%	Nuts (for example, peanuts or almonds) or nut butters (for example, peanut butter or almond butter)
47%	45%	Beans (for example, lentils, chickpeas, black beans, kidney beans, bean burritos, or bean tacos)
47%	49%	Leafy green vegetables (for example kale, collards, or broccoli)
30%	17%	Plant-based meat (for example, veggie burgers or plant-based deli slices)
30%	23%	Plant-based milk (for example, soy milk, coconut milk, almond milk, or rice milk)
25%	14%	Soy foods (for example, soy milk, soy hot dogs, or soy hamburgers)

Since 23% of youth during the week usually consume plant-based milk, USDA and schools may want to consider making it easier for students to obtain soymilk or plant-based nutrition equivalent milks in school lunches.

This survey was conducted by YouGov. All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov PLC. Total sample size was 1,002 youth. Fieldwork was undertaken between February 9-17, 2021 in the United States. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all U.S. children (aged 8-17). All results are based on a sample and are therefore subject to statistical errors normally associated with sample-based information. For the first question only, with a sample size of 1,000, we can have a 95% confidence level that that the number of vegetarians is 5% plus or minus 1%, and that the number of vegans is 2%, plus or

minus 1%. This poll was taken during the COVID-19 pandemic. We do not know what influence, if any, that may have had on the survey answers. Though the polls can't be compared because they are done differently, in our 2000 VRG Youth Poll, about two percent of 6-17 years olds were vegetarian and one half percent were vegan. See: vrg.org/journal/vj2001jan/2001_jan_teen.php

Be careful when comparing poll numbers to other countries, as questions and definition of vegetarian and vegan are often different.

*Northeast includes: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont.

South includes: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia.

Midwest includes: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin.

West includes: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, Wyoming.

According to the U.S. Census <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/popest/tables/2010-2019/national/asrh/nc-est2019-syasexn.xlsx> there are about 41 million 8-17 year olds. Thus there are approximately 2 million eight- to 17-year-old vegetarians (including vegans) and about 820,000 vegans in that age group in the United States. Note that since we defined what respondents did not eat, and used the word "never," others may have higher figures. You may be interested in reading about some of those youth who have won our annual vegetarian college scholarships since 2003. See: vrg.org/student/scholar.htm

For information on Vegan Nutrition for Teenagers, see: vrg.org/nutrition/VeganNutritionForTeenagers.pdf

For information on other polls, see: vrg.org/nutshell/faq.htm#poll