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The difference in eating habits between men and women

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When it comes to what we eat, men and women really are different according to scientific research presented today (March 19) at the 2008 International Conference on Emerging Infectious Diseases in Atlanta, Georgia. In general, men are more likely to report eating meat and poultry items and women are more likely to report eating fruits and vegetables.

The findings come from the most recent population survey of the Foodborne Disease Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet). From May 2006 to April 2007 over 14,000 American adults participated in an extensive survey outlining their eating habits, including high risk foods for foodborne illness.

“There was such a variety of data we thought it would be interesting to see whether there were any gender differences. To our knowledge, there have been studies in the literature on gender differences in eating habits, but nothing this extensive,” says Beletshachew Shiferaw, a lead researcher on the study.

Shiferaw and her colleagues found that men were significantly more likely to eat meat and poultry products especially duck, veal, and ham. They were also more likely to eat certain shellfish such as shrimp and oysters.

Women, on the other hand were more likely to eat vegetables, especially carrots and tomatoes. As for fruits, they were more likely to eat

strawberries, blueberries, raspberries and apples. Women also preferred dry foods, such as almonds and walnuts, and were more likely to consume eggs and yogurt when compared with men.

There were some exceptions to the general trend. Men were significantly more likely to consume asparagus and brussels sprouts than women while women were more likely to consume fresh hamburgers (as opposed to frozen, which the men preferred).

The researchers also looked at reported behavior in regards to consumption of 6 risky foods: undercooked hamburger, runny or undercooked eggs, raw oysters, unpasteurized milk, cheese made from unpasteurized milk and alfalfa sprouts. Men were significantly more likely to eat undercooked hamburger and runny eggs while women were more likely to eat alfalfa sprouts.

This information is important to public health officials because better understanding of gender differences in eating habits can help them create more targeted strategies for prevention.

“The reason we looked at consumption and risky behaviors was to see if there was a statistically significant difference between men and women and if there is this information could be used by health educators to target interventions,” says Shiferaw.

Source: American Society for Microbiology

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