

Consumer purchases of cakes, cookies, pies have decreased by 24 percent

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Ready-to-eat grain-based desserts (RTE GBDs) are pre-packaged consumer baked goods such as cakes, cookies, pies, doughnuts, and pastries. These types of products contribute a significant amount of energy, sugar, and saturated fat to Americans' diets, making them a strategic target for researchers looking to pinpoint ways to lower consumption of empty calories.

In an effort to develop new methods to monitor efforts to improve dietary quality in the United States, investigators from the University of North Carolina set out to analyze the RTE GBD product category from two angles: the first examined whether changes have been made to the [nutritional content](#) of manufactured RTE GBD products and the second, to determine if consumers purchased fewer products or shifted towards products with lower energy, sugar, or saturated [fat content](#). The results published in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* found that there has been little change in the nutritional content of RTE GBDs manufactured or purchased between 2005 and 2012; however overall consumer purchases of RTE GBDs declined by 24% during that same time period.

"The results of this study indicated that larger wide-scale efforts are needed among public health officials and all manufacturers of RTE GBDs to shift consumer purchases towards products with lower energy, sugar, and saturated fat content," observed the lead author of the study, Dr. Kevin C. Mathias, a recent graduate of the Nutrition Department at the University of North Carolina.

While reformulating existing RTE GBDs to provide healthier food choices presents many hurdles for manufacturers, such as replicating taste, appearance, and texture, new products coming to market are not much better nutritionally speaking than their old counterparts. "The results from this analysis show that the new RTE GBD products released in 2012 did not have lower energy, sugar, or saturated fat densities than the products already existing on the market," noted Dr. Mathias. On the public health sector side there is also room for improvement. Development of new front-of-package labeling systems that shift consumer purchases towards products with lower energy, sugar, and saturated fat content is another opportunity to help consumers improve their dietary intake.

In terms of what Americans are buying at the supermarket, the study did show that there is some good news. Between 2005 and 2012, household purchases of RTE GBDs decreased by 24%. The authors noted that changes in consumer behavior can also have unexpected drawbacks. "A potential concern of shifting purchases of RTE GBDs towards products with lower energy, sugar, or saturated fat content is that consumers could potentially purchase more RTE GBD products if they are perceived to be healthier." Stealth reformulations by which changes in the product composition are conducted unbeknownst to consumers is one option to circumvent this issue," said Dr. Mathias. These potential issues highlight the need for continual monitoring of both the amount and nutritional content of products purchased to ensure that efforts to improve consumer choices are effective.

Overall, expanding our understanding of the products available and types of products purchased in the American marketplace is an important step to monitor the effectiveness of efforts designed to help consumers make healthier dietary choices. "The results from the product and purchase level analyses highlight an opportunity for both food manufacturers and [public health](#) officials to work together to develop strategies to shift

consumer purchases towards [products](#) with lower energy, sugar, and [saturated fat](#) densities in addition to decreasing overall purchases of RTE GBDs," concluded Dr. Mathias.

More information: "Monitoring Changes in the Nutritional Content of Ready-To-Eat Grain-Based Dessert Products Manufactured and Purchased Between 2005 and 2012," by Kevin C. Mathias, PhD; Shu Wen Ng, PhD; Barry M Popkin, PhD, *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, [DOI: 10.1016/j.jand.2014.10.018](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2014.10.018)

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