

Men's diets are related to local offerings, unlike women's

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Credit: George Hodan/public domain

Canadian men's eating habits are associated with the availability of healthy food sources in their residential neighbourhood but women's are not, according to researchers at the University of Montreal and its affiliated CHUM hospital.

"We found that, for men only, intake of fruit and vegetables was

positively associated with the proportion of healthy [food](#) outlets around home", explained Christelle M. Clary of the university's department of social and preventative medicine, who led the study. Why men and not women? "This may be because women, who are in general more nutritionally knowledgeable, may engage in different food shopping strategies than men, and rely on other aspects of the food environment than the proportion of food stores locally available," suggested Professor Yan Kestens, who directed the study.

The study was based on data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), and looked at the eating habits of 49,403 Canadians living in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary and Ottawa (including Gatineau, Quebec). The food outlets of each city were mapped using a database containing information on the type and location of all food businesses. For the purpose of this study, supermarkets, grocery stores, fruit and vegetable stores and natural food stores were considered as potential sources of "healthy foods" (especially fruits and vegetables), while convenience stores and fast-food restaurants were considered less [healthy food](#) sources.

This data was then overlaid with the participant's residential postal codes in order to assess the relative availability of healthy and unhealthy food sources around participant's home. Researchers accounted for other factors known to influence [eating habits](#), such as age, education, or income. "Overall, the data show that women from our sample declare eating on average 4.4 portions of [fruit and vegetables](#) per day, almost one more daily portion than men," Clary said. "The data also show that fruit and [vegetable consumption](#) is significantly higher in Montreal, at 4.14 portions per day, than in Toronto, at 3.86 portions per day," she added.

Why men's fruit and vegetable consumption is related to the proportion of healthy outlets remains unclear. "Among the potential explanations

for these findings is that neighbourhoods where healthy (or unhealthy) [food sources](#) are bountiful may reflect social norms regarding food consumption in that area, encouraging individuals to conform to the social norm," Kestens explained. The research team believes that more research is needed to gain a better understanding of the mechanisms linking [food environments](#) and diet. "Overall, the statement of differential findings within Canadian population that we have uncovered warns against the search for a single universal effect of food environments on our health-related habits," Kestens concluded.

Provided by University of Montreal

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