

# COVID-19 lockdown reduced mental health, sleep, exercise

October 23 2020

Personal Behavior	Before the Pandemic	During the Pandemic
Cooked at home 6 or more times per week	39 percent	65 percent
Reported their anxiety very or extremely difficult to manage	6 percent	21 percent
Eating out four or more times per week (includes takeout)	14 percent	4 percent

Credit: Pennington Biomedical Research Center

A first-of-its-kind global survey shows the initial phase of the COVID-19 lockdown dramatically altered our personal habits, largely for the worse.

"The stay-at-home orders did result in one major health positive. Overall, healthy eating increased because we ate out less frequently. However, we snacked more. We got less exercise. We went to bed later and slept more poorly. Our anxiety levels doubled," said Leanne

Redman, Ph.D., Associate Executive Director for Scientific Education at Pennington Biomedical Research Center.

The global survey evaluated the inadvertent changes in health behaviors that took place under the pandemic's widespread restrictions. Researchers found that the lockdown's effects were magnified among people with [obesity](#).

"Overall, people with obesity improved their diets the most. But they also experienced the sharpest declines in mental health and the highest incidence of weight gain," Dr. Redman said. "One-third of people with obesity gained weight during the lockdown, compared to 20.5 percent of people with normal weight or overweight."

The online survey study ran during the month of April. More than 12,000 people worldwide took a look at the survey and 7,754 completed the detailed online questionnaire. The majority of the respondents were in the United States, with half from Louisiana. Residents of Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and more than 50 other countries also responded.

Those who took the survey reacted to the pandemic in largely the same way whether they live in Louisiana, elsewhere in the United States or abroad.

"This study is the first to survey thousands of people across the globe on lifestyle behavior changes in response to stay-at-home orders. Groundbreaking research like this is part and parcel of Pennington Biomedical's mission. The study demonstrates that chronic diseases like obesity affect our health beyond the physical," said Executive Director John Kirwan, Ph.D.. "Dr. Redman's study is just one of many initiatives the center launched to help understand COVID-19's impact and to slow its spread."

The research team would like physicians and scientists to modify the way they manage patients with obesity in two ways, said Emily Flanagan, Ph.D., lead author of the study and a postdoctoral researcher in Dr. Redman's Reproductive Endocrinology and Women's Health Laboratory.

- By increasing the number of [mental health](#) screenings during and after the pandemic.
- By remaining connected to patients/study participants through remote visits and telehealth to prevent irreversible health effects from the pandemic. So-called virtual visits can assuage patients' concerns about the safety of in-person visits.

**More information:** Emily W. Flanagan et al, The impact of COVID-19 stay-at-home orders on health behaviors in adults, *Obesity* (2020). [DOI: 10.1002/oby.23066](https://doi.org/10.1002/oby.23066)

Provided by Pennington Biomedical Research Center

Citation: COVID-19 lockdown reduced mental health, sleep, exercise (2020, October 23)  
retrieved 19 April 2024 from  
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-10-covid-lockdown-mental-health.html>

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