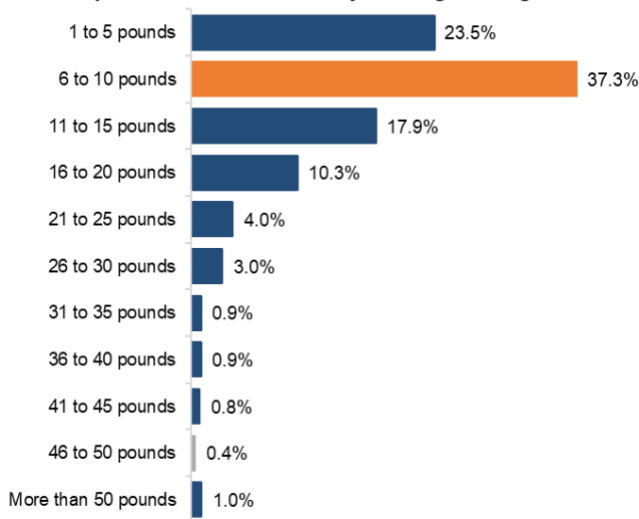


**New report suggests 42.3% of Canadians have gained extra weight unintentionally during pandemic**

**HALIFAX, NS. (April 27, 2021)** – The **Agri-Food Analytics Lab** at **Dalhousie University**, in partnership with **Caddle**, is releasing a new report on wellness and stress management. This survey’s intent was to measure how the pandemic has affected Canadians’ health and food habits, and how well they have been coping with stress generated by the public health crisis.

A total of 9,991 Canadians were surveyed on wellness in April 2021. Canadians were asked if their stress level increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 77% of Canadians agreed that their stress level was impacted. The younger generations appear to have been more impacted. While a total 83% of Millennials<sup>1</sup> believe they are more stressed than before the pandemic, 82% of the Generation Z<sup>2</sup> are more stressed than before the pandemic. A total of 78% of Gen Xers<sup>3</sup> believe to be more stressed than before the pandemic, and 68% of Boomers<sup>4</sup> believe their stress level has gone up since March 2020.

**Figure 1: You've said you gained weight during the pandemic. How much did your weight change?**



Canadians were asked whether they tend to eat when they are under more stress. A total of 51.4% of Canadians admitted that they tend to eat when they feel worried about the pandemic. Women are slightly more inclined to **stress-eat** due to the pandemic than men. A total of 53.0% of women have admitted to stress-eating during the pandemic, versus 47.1% for men.

**Eating habits** were impacted by the stress generated by the pandemic. A total of 74% of Canadians have admitted that the pandemic impacted their eating habits. The province where the highest number of people who believe their eating habits have changed is

Newfoundland and Labrador, at 84%, followed by Nova Scotia with 81%. The lowest rates were registered in Quebec (68%), Ontario (74%) and New Brunswick (74%).

We also asked a series of questions about **weight management**. A total of 58% of Canadians have acknowledged that their weight has changed since the beginning of the pandemic. Of that group, 73% admitted they have gained extra and unintentional weight since March 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Millennials: Born 1981-1996.

<sup>2</sup> Generation Z: Born 1997-2005.

<sup>3</sup> Generation X: Born 1965-1980.

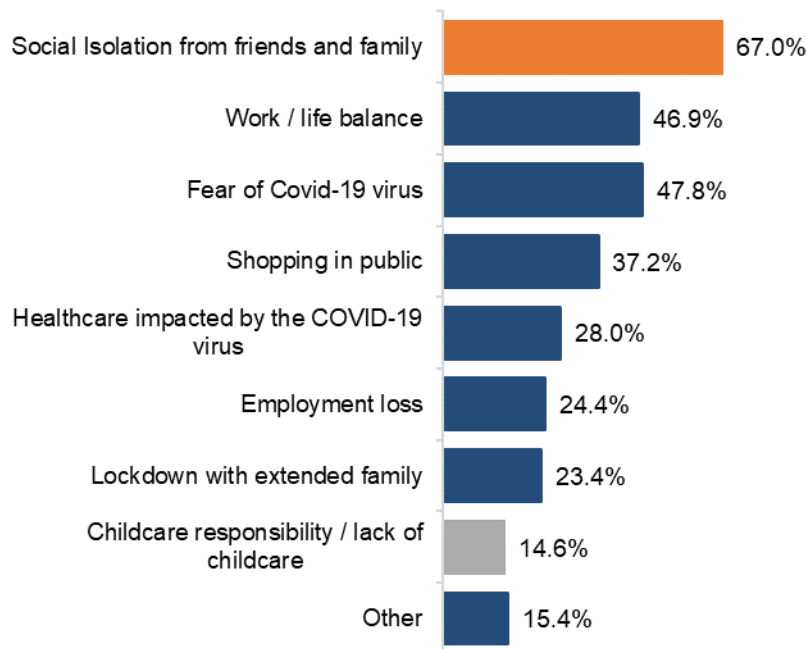
<sup>4</sup> Boomers: Born 1946-1964.

This means that 42.3% of the Canadian population has gained some weight since the start of the pandemic. A total of 15.6% have lost weight. Gender-wise, 76% of women admitting to a weight change have gained some weight, while 71% of men whose weight has changed gained some weight. A total of 37.3% of those who have gained weight, have gained 6 to 10 pounds (see Figure 1).

We know many Canadians struggle to keep their weight stable as they get older, so we should expect Canadians to gain weight regardless. Recent research has uncovered that lipid turnover in fat tissue decreases when someone ages, even if someone does not eat more or exercise less than before.<sup>5</sup> However, in 14 months, Canadians may have gained more weight unintentionally than during pandemic-free periods.

**Meal management** also appears to be a challenge since the beginning of the pandemic. Canadians were asked if they have been able to effectively manage mealtimes since the beginning of the pandemic. Only 8.8% said that they have been able to manage mealtimes properly, while 32.5% have said they are able to, most of the time. Most Canadians have experienced some challenges when managing mealtimes since the beginning of the pandemic.

**Figure 2: What are some of your personal pandemic stressors?**



<sup>5</sup> P. Arner, S. Bernard, L. Appelsved, K.-Y. Fu, D. P. Andersson, M. Salehpour, A. Thorell, M. Rydén, K. L. Spalding. Adipose lipid turnover and long-term changes in body weight. *Nature Medicine*, 2019; 25 (9): 1385 DOI: 10.1038/s41591-019-0565-5

We also asked questions about **healthy snacking**. We asked how often Canadians were eating healthy snacks during the pandemic. Only 26.1% of Canadians believe they eat healthy snacks “all the time”, or “most of the time”. A total of 73.9% are eating healthy snacks, “occasionally” or “never”.

The most significant **personal pandemic stressors** have been self-isolation from friends and family (see Figure 2). A total of 67.0% of Canadians see this as the most important personal pandemic stressor in their lives. When asked if they are likely to eat more when other people are around versus when they are by themselves, 19.4% agreed. These results suggest extended periods of loneliness may have enticed Canadians to eat more during the pandemic. Here are some more results related to snacking and eating due to stress incurred by the pandemic.

<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>“AGREE” OR “STRONGLY AGREE”</b>	<b>“DISAGREE” OR “STRONGLY DISAGREE”</b>
<b>DURING THE PANDEMIC, EATING MAKES ME FEEL BETTER WHEN I AM LONELY.</b>	48.0%	17.5%
<b>SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC, WHEN I AM FEELING LOW OR DOWN, A LITTLE SNACK WILL LIFT MY MOOD.</b>	61.3%	13.3%
<b>SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC, WHEN I'M DEPRESSED, I HAVE MORE DESIRE TO EAT.</b>	49.1%	23.4%
<b>SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC, IF SOMEONE DISAPPOINTS ME, I WANT TO EAT SOMETHING.</b>	34.7%	31.6%
<b>SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC, WHEN I AM PRESSURED OR WORKING UNDER A DEADLINE, I HAVE THE URGE TO EAT A SNACK.</b>	38.4%	32.1%
<b>SINCE THE START OF THE PANDEMIC, I EAT MORE WHEN I AM STRESSED THAN WHEN I AM CALM.</b>	50.4%	21.1%

This report suggest Canadians are still struggling with eating habits during the pandemic, and that stress appears to be affecting most of them. The pandemic has put a significant toll on the physical health of Canadians, which will need to be addressed once the public health crisis dissipates. What is noteworthy is how younger generations have also been impacted by the pandemic, more so than older generations.

**End of report.**

Full report here: <https://www.dal.ca/sites/agri-food.html>

### **Contacts**

**Sylvain Charlebois**, Director

Agri-Food Analytics Lab, Dalhousie University

[sylvain.charlebois@dal.ca](mailto:sylvain.charlebois@dal.ca)

**Janet Music**, Research Program Coordinator

Agri-Food Analytics Lab, Dalhousie University

[janet.music@dal.ca](mailto:janet.music@dal.ca)

**Methodology:** A representative survey of Canadians was conducted in April 2021, in partnership with Caddle. 9,991 Canadians participated in this survey.

**Margin of Error:** +/- 1.3%, 19 times out of 20. Any discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding.

**Research Ethics Certificate:** No. 2020-5215.

**Disclosure:** Funding for this survey was provided by **Caddle** and **Dalhousie University**.