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Food Spending Depends on Age and Income

By 2030, about 24 percent of the U.S. population will be age 65 or older, compared with 12 percent today. How will an aging population affect how much and what types of food are purchased? A new ERS report found that per person food spending increases until the head of household turns 65. For example, in 2004, households with a head age 25-34 had an average per capita household income of \$19,401 and spent \$1,918 per person on total food (food purchased in grocery stores and in restaurants and other eating places). In contrast, those with heads age 55-64 had an average per capita income of \$31,914 and averaged \$2,719 per person on food. After age 65, income and per person food expenditures declined.

Households with heads 65 and older, however, outspent younger households in some at-home food categories: cereal and



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bakery products, dairy products, and miscellaneous prepared foods. In the latter category, one of the biggest differences was for frozen meals. Households with a head age 65 or older spent about \$21 per person per year on frozen meals versus \$15 per person in households headed by someone age 55-64 and \$11 per person in households with a head age 25-34.

Fruit and vegetables is another category where households headed by older Americans outspent younger households.

The largest dollar difference in the fruit and vegetable category occurred for processed fruit, where households with heads older than 64 averaged \$61 per person per year versus \$54 for households with a head age 55-64.

Will these patterns continue as today's baby boomers and Generation X-ers age? Perhaps not. Aging brings some changes in food choices, but these choices are also shaped by life experiences and eating habits. Younger Americans may have formed different eating patterns than their grandparents did when they were young. This future generation of older Americans may have different eating patterns than today's older generation. \mathcal{W}

Noel Blisard
Hayden Stewart,
hstewart@ers.usda.gov

This finding is drawn from . . .

Food Spending in American Households, 2003-04, by Noel Blisard and Hayden Stewart, EIB-23, USDA, Economic Research Service, March 2007, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/eib23/

Spending on eating out reflects lifestyles and income

Food item	Age of household head in years				
	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and older
	<i>Dollars per person, 2004</i>				
Total food	1,918	1,941	2,511	2,719	2,477
Food away from home	812	733	975	1,072	826
Food at home	1,106	1,208	1,536	1,648	1,651
Cereal and bakery	153	172	210	216	240
Meats, poultry, fish, and eggs	286	321	420	444	419
Dairy	120	138	167	186	193
Fruit and vegetables	189	197	260	299	316
Miscellaneous prepared foods	192	200	237	242	247

Source: USDA, Economic Research Service analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2004 Consumer Expenditure Survey.