



The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research

MORE THAN HALF OF AMERICANS **FACING FOOD CHALLENGES STRUGGLE** TO GET SUPPORT

Perceptions of ineligibility, confusion about how to enroll, and a lack of services in local communities kept more than 12.5 million experiencing food challenges from getting any help at all.

Nearly a quarter of Americans report experiencing food challenges, and 37% of adults received some type of food assistance from a nonprofit organization or a government service to help feed their household in the last year, according to a new study from Impact Genome and The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. But many also faced barriers to accessing needed services to meet these challenges.

Twenty-three percent of Americans report experiencing food challenges in the last yearincluding 4% saying they sometimes or often did not have enough to eat, and 19% saying they had enough, but not the kinds of foods they wanted. More than half (58%) of adults struggling with food challenges also faced at least one barrier accessing services, and 21% of those with challenges—12.5 million adults—could not access any government or nonprofit food assistance program. The most common reason cited is a perception that they were not eligible for support.

The survey asked those experiencing food challenges which strategies were necessary for meeting their family's food needs. Half (50%) say they would need extra money to pay for food and bills, 29% need more reliable transportation, and 26% need additional free food. Many are uncertain of how long they would need support. To cope, Americans with food challenges are choosing longer-lasting nonperishables (49%), buying cheaper foods (42%), and managing finances (39%).



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Three Things You Should Know

About the Impact Genome/AP-NORC Poll Among American Adults:

- 1) 37% got food assistance from a nonprofit organization or a government service in the last year.
- 2) 58% of adults struggling with food challenges also faced at least one barrier to accessing services.
- 3) 50% who faced difficulty getting food in the last year say they need extra money to help pay for food or bills, while 29% need more reliable transportation and 26% need more free food. Many are unsure of how long they would need assistance.

Healthy eating is another dimension of food security tackled by the study, which found that while most Americans self-report eating healthily over the last year, 27% lack confidence in their household's ability to get enough healthy and nutritious food to eat. About a third struggle with knowing which foods are healthy when shopping, how to plan and prepare nutritious meals, and are unsure about what they need to be healthy. People facing food challenges are less confident in their ability to get healthy food: just 27% are very or extremely confident compared to 87% of those not facing food challenges. They are also less confident with more specific knowledge about how to be healthy and get nutritious food on the table.

Where people get their food is closely linked to healthy eating: 13% regularly get their food from convenience stores, with those already experiencing food challenges nearly twice as likely to regularly frequent these outlets (21% vs. 11%).

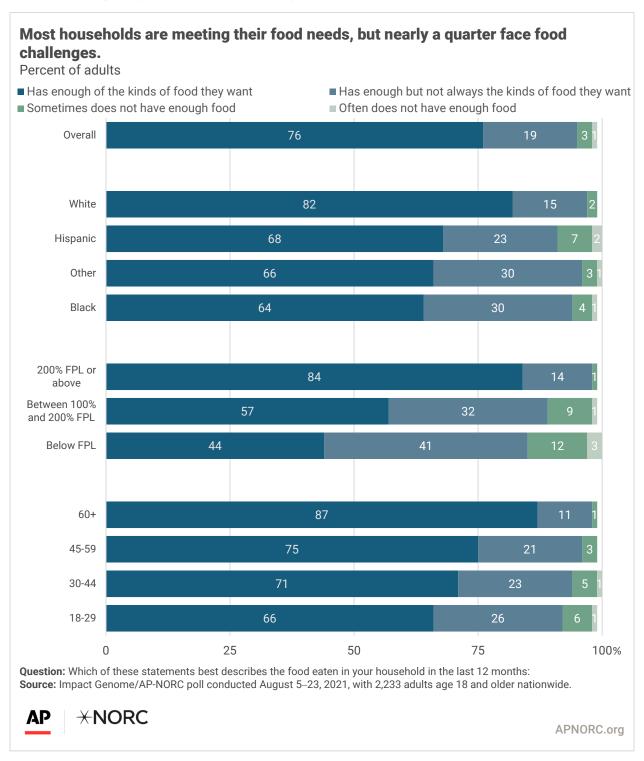
The nationwide Impact Genome/AP-NORC Poll was conducted with support from The Albertsons Companies Foundation between August 5 and 23, 2021, with 2,233 adults age 18 and older using AmeriSpeak®, the probability-based panel of NORC at the University of Chicago. Interviews were conducted online and via telephone using landlines and cell phones. The margin of sampling error is +/- 3.2 percentage points.

Other key findings include:

- About a third of Americans say they struggle with knowing which foods are healthy when they shop, how to plan and prepare nutritious meals, and what they need to be healthy.
- Just 27% of those facing food challenges are very or extremely confident in their ability to get healthy food, compared to 87% of those not facing food challenges. They are also less confident about knowing how to be healthy and get nutritious food on the table.
- 24% say it is difficult for them to find time to cook healthy food at home, and more than a third (36%) cite time constraints, saying the pandemic has exacerbated the problem.
- 13% regularly frequent convenience stores to meet their food needs. Those already experiencing food challenges are more likely to regularly shop at convenience stores (21% vs. 11%), as are those below 200% of the federal poverty line (FPL) and Black Americans.
- Those who frequent convenience stores for their food are less likely to regularly buy (48% vs. 76%) and eat (47% vs. 72%) healthy food than those who rarely or never shop there.

ALTHOUGH MOST HAD ENOUGH TO EAT OVER THE LAST YEAR, NEARLY A QUARTER FACED FOOD CHALLENGES.

In the last year, nearly a quarter of Americans faced food challenges: 4% have sometimes or often not had enough to eat, while another 19% say they have enough, but not always the kinds of food they want. Those experiencing food challenges were more likely to be Black, Hispanic, or adults of another race, as well as younger adults and those living below 200% of the FPL.



Households who faced food challenges in the last year were more likely than those who did not to report running out of food between grocery shopping trips (66% vs. 10%), struggling to purchase balanced meals (69% vs. 11%), cutting the size of or skipping meals (41% vs. 3%), eating less than they felt they should (44% vs. 3%), or not eating when they were hungry (31% vs. 2%). Similarly, those facing food challenges were more likely to say they cut back on their meals for more than three months (32% vs. 1%).

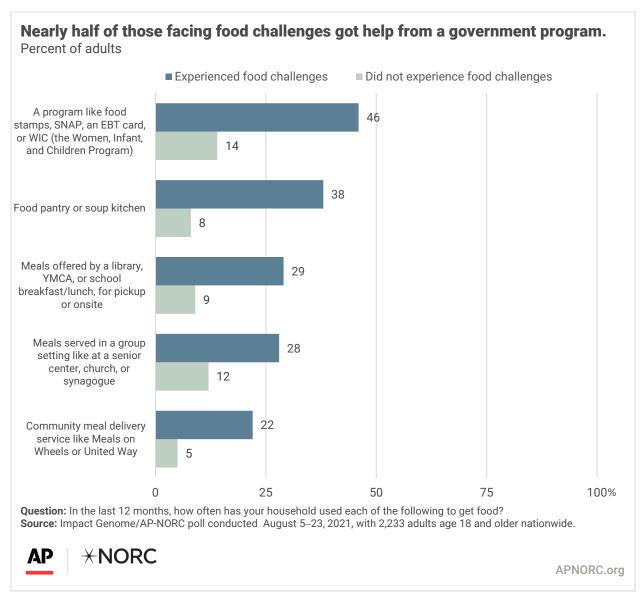
Overall, 3% of adults spend \$50-\$99 on food a month, 15% spend \$100-199, 56% spend \$200-499, 21% spend \$500-999, and 4% spend \$1,000 or more.

MORE THAN A THIRD OF U.S. HOUSEHOLDS GOT FOOD ASSISTANCE FROM A NONPROFIT OR GOVERNMENT SERVICE. BUT 58% EXPERIENCING FOOD CHALLENGES STRUGGLED TO GET HELP.

Thirty-seven percent-94 million adults-sought assistance from a nonprofit organization or a government service to feed their household in the last year. Nine percent received food from a community meal delivery service like Meals on Wheels or the United Way; 15% from a food pantry or soup kitchen; 13% from meals offered at a library, YMCA, or school breakfast or lunch; and 16% from meals served in a group setting like a senior center, church, or synagogue.

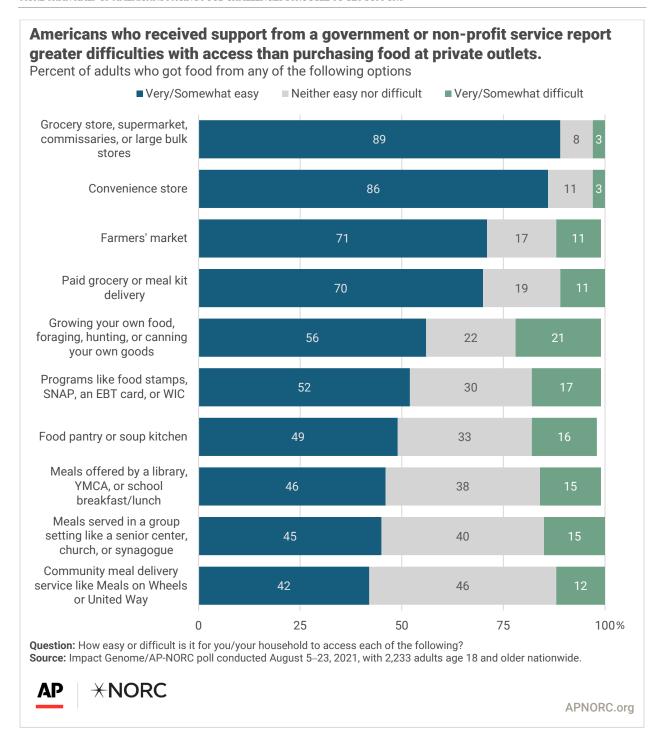
Although a little more than half (53%) say they were rare users, Black and Hispanic adults, households below 200% of the federal poverty level, and households with children are more likely to have received support from a government or food assistance program.

Those who faced food challenges were about twice as likely to get help from a government or nonprofit as those who did not report challenges, and most (61%) sought help from more than one source. Nearly half of those facing food challenges (46%) got support from a government program in the last 12 months.



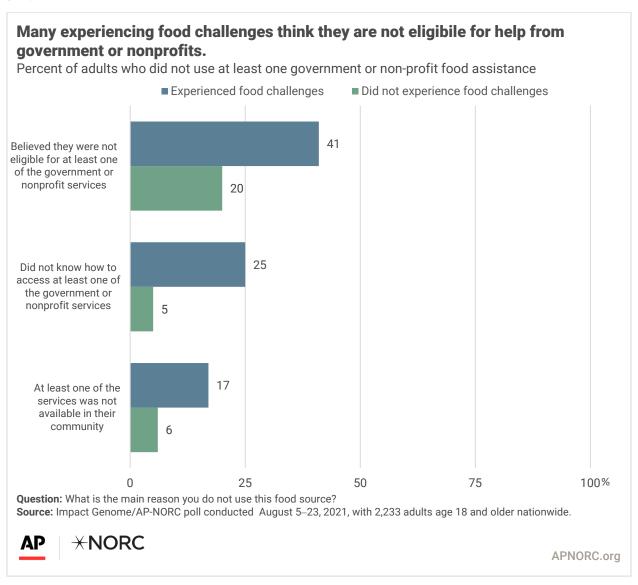
Nearly six in ten (58%) adults facing food challenges report at least one barrier to accessing services. Among food assistance program users, 9% experienced difficulties with access over the last year, with Black Americans and those living below 200% FPL being more likely to report challenges.

Most users of grocery stores, convenience stores, and farmers' markets report easy access to these outlets, but users of government and community meal programs had a harder time. People who used government programs like food stamps or SNAP had the hardest time accessing services, with 17% experiencing difficulties over the last year.



ABOUT 12.5 MILLION PEOPLE FACING FOOD CHALLENGES COULD NOT ACCESS ANY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MOST BELIEVE THEY ARE **INELIGIBLE FOR HELP.**

Seventeen percent of Americans say they tried to access a government or nonprofit service but could not because they believe they are ineligible, they did not know how to access support, or services weren't available in their community. The most common challenge was perceptions of ineligibility, with 85% of non-users citing this reason. Twenty-one percent of those experiencing food challengesmore than 12.5 million Americans-could not access any government or nonprofit food assistance program.

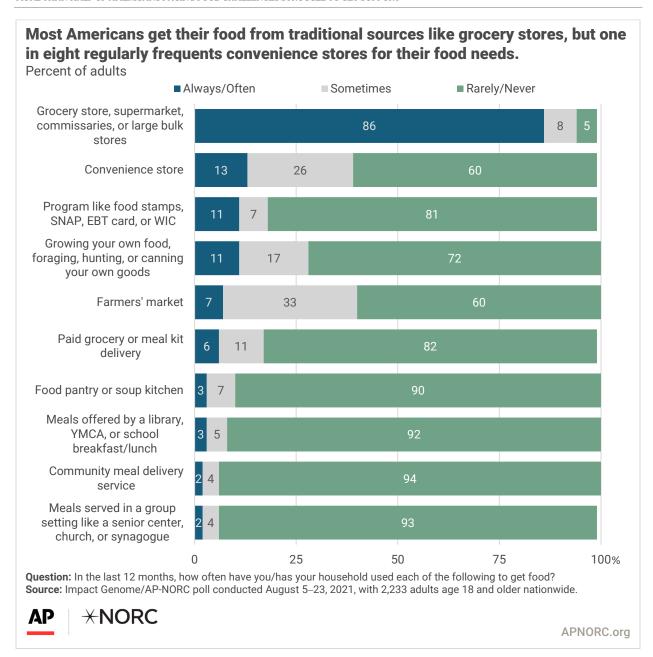


ALTHOUGH MOST AMERICANS GET FOOD FROM A GROCERY STORE, ONE IN EIGHT REGULARLY FREQUENTS CONVENIENCE STORES

Despite the challenges faced during the pandemic, a majority (86%) of Americans always or often get their food from traditional sources like grocery stores, commissaries, and big box stores. Yet, the survey revealed a more complex picture of food security, with 13% reporting regularly getting food from a convenience store and 4% saying they have difficulty accessing a grocery store or one is unavailable in their community. Black adults are more likely than white adults (21% vs. 10%), and those living below 200% are more likely than wealthier households (23% vs. 10%) to get food from a convenience store. Those already experiencing food challenges are also more likely to regularly shop at convenience stores (21% vs. 11%) and less likely to frequent grocery stores (71% vs. 91%). Eight percent of convenience store shoppers report difficulties accessing grocery stores or big box stores.

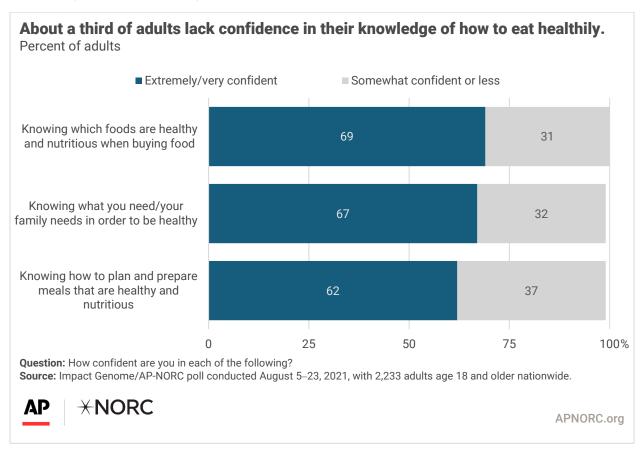
During the pandemic, 42% tried their hand at growing, foraging, hunting, or canning their food. Younger Americans and those living in nonmetropolitan areas were more likely to adopt alternative food sourcing habits, but 21% of these users experienced challenges in their experience.

Just 7% of Americans regularly attended farmers' markets for their groceries. People who did not visit a farmers' market were more likely to be living below the FPL and without a college degree. Sixteen percent of those who did not visit a farmers' market in the last year say they did not because it wasn't available in their community. Only 6% of Americans regularly used a meal kit or grocery delivery service, with 14% of those who did not use such services citing affordability.

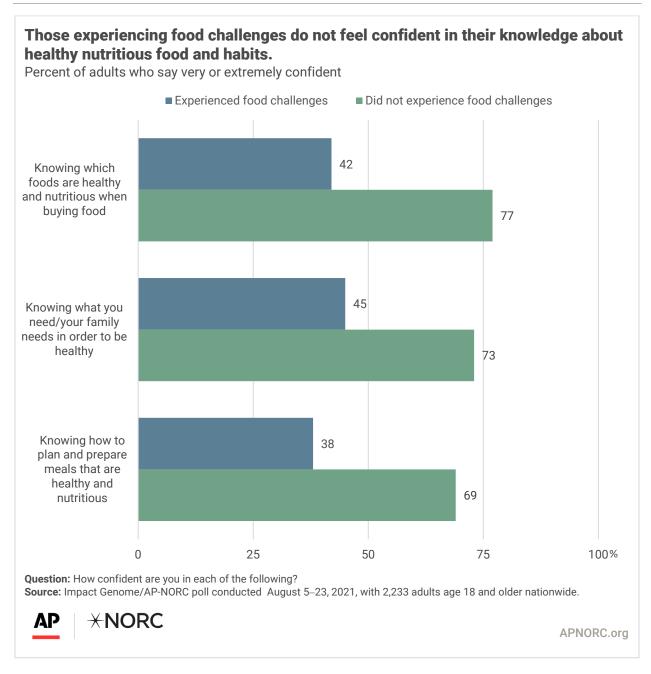


WHILE MUCH OF THE PUBLIC REPORTS EATING HEALTHY, SOME STRUGGLE TO PUT NUTRITIOUS FOOD ON THE TABLE.

Seventy-three percent of adults are very or extremely confident in their household's ability to get enough healthy and nutritious food to eat. However, 21% are only somewhat confident, and 6%-15 million adults—are not very confident or not confident at all. About a third lack confidence in knowing which foods are healthy when shopping, how to plan and prepare nutritious meals, and what they or their family needs to be healthy.



Those facing food challenges show lower confidence in their ability to get healthy food: just 27% say they are very or extremely confident compared to 87% of those not facing food challenges. They are also less confident with more specific knowledge about being healthy and getting nutritious food on the table.



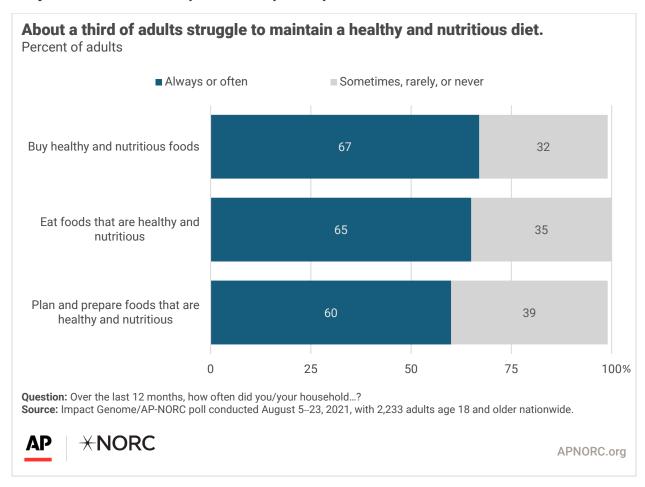
Confidence in these areas also varies by income, race and ethnicity, and age.

Just 39% of adults in households below the FPL are confident in their household's ability to get enough healthy and nutritious food to eat, and just 47% of those between 100%-200% of FPL feel the same. Eighty-three percent of those in households above 200% of FPL are confident. Those above 200% of FPL are more confident than those with lower incomes in knowing which foods are nutritious (74% vs. 52%), how to plan and prepare healthy meals (66% vs. 49%), and what they need to be healthy (71% vs. 54%).

Looking at race and ethnicity, 78% of white adults are confident in their household's ability to get enough healthy and nutritious food compared to 62% of Black adults and 65% of Hispanic adults. They are also more likely to feel confident knowing which foods are nutritious (74% vs. 57% and 56%, respectively) and what they need to be healthy (71% vs. 60% and 57%, respectively).

Older adults are most confident in their ability to get enough healthy and nutritious food, with 84% of those age 65 and older saying so compared to 68% of those age 18-64. They are also more confident in knowing which foods are healthy (75% vs. 66%), how to plan and prepare healthy meals (73% vs. 57%), and what they need to be healthy (76% vs. 63%).

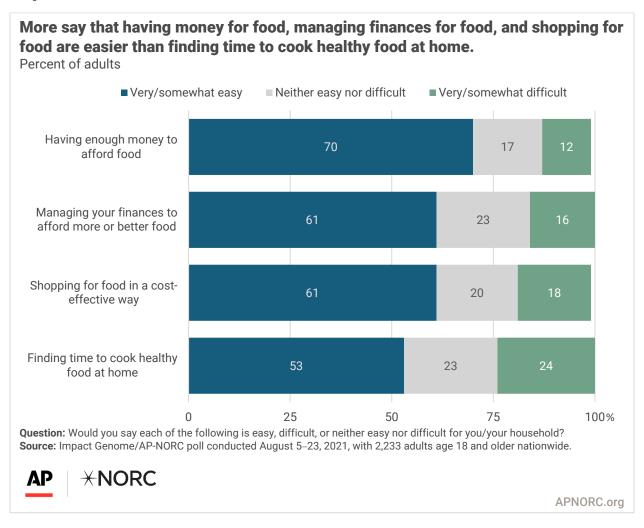
About two-thirds of adults report frequently buying, preparing, and eating healthy foods, but some struggle to work healthy foods into their diets. Thirty-nine percent plan and prepare healthy and nutritious foods just sometimes or less often, and 35% say the same about eating healthy food. Thirtytwo percent sometimes, rarely, or never buy healthy and nutritious foods.



Healthy eating habits relate to where people shop for food. Even controlling for other demographic characteristics, those who always or often get food at a convenience store are less likely to frequently buy healthy, nutritious food than those who rarely or never shop there (48% vs. 76%). Similarly, they are less likely to plan and prepare healthy food (47% vs. 68%) and eat healthy food (47% vs. 72%) often or always. Yet, those who shop at farmers' markets frequently are more likely to shop for (75% vs. 64%), plan and prepare (74% vs. 56%), and eat (78% vs. 61%) healthy food.

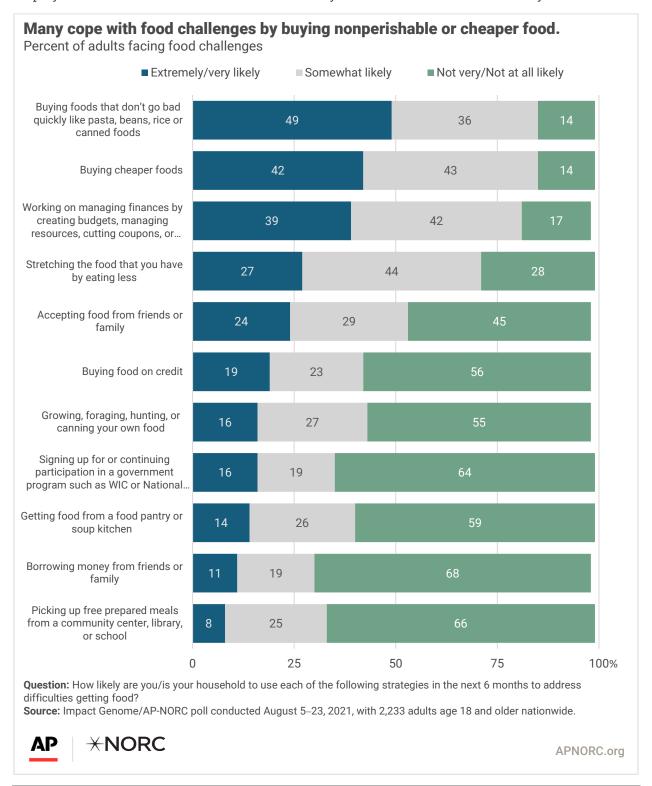
For some, cooking healthy food is a matter of finding the time: 24% say it is difficult for them to find time to cook healthy food at home. Fifty-three percent, however, say it is easy to find time to cook healthy food. For some, the pandemic has made it more difficult to find time (36%), but 15% say it has made it easier, and 50% say it hasn't changed.

Americans are more likely to find it easy to have money to afford food (70%), manage their finances to afford more or better food (61%), and shop for food in a cost-effective way (61%). But majorities feel that the pandemic has made it more difficult to do each of these.

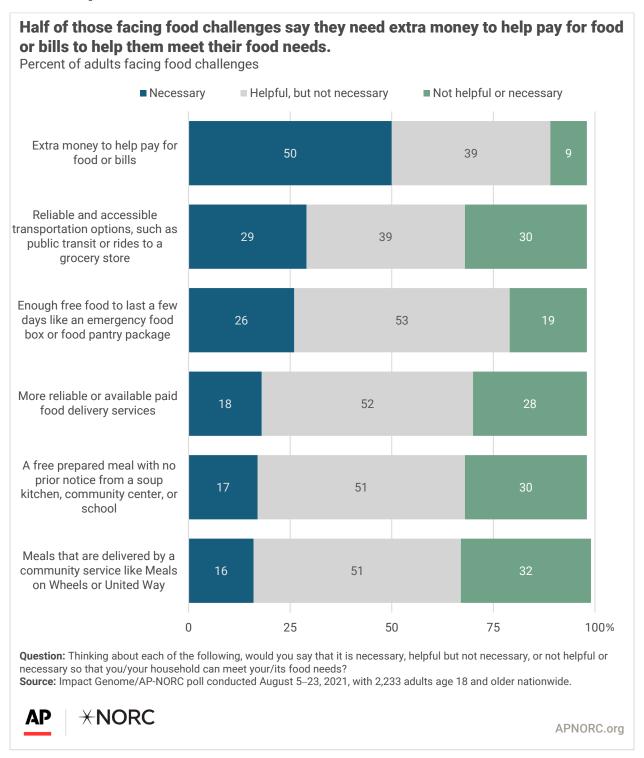


THOSE FACING FOOD CHALLENGES EMPLOY A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES TO MEET THEIR FOOD NEEDS, BUT MOST AGREE THAT EXTRA MONEY TO PAY FOR FOOD WOULD BE HELPFUL.

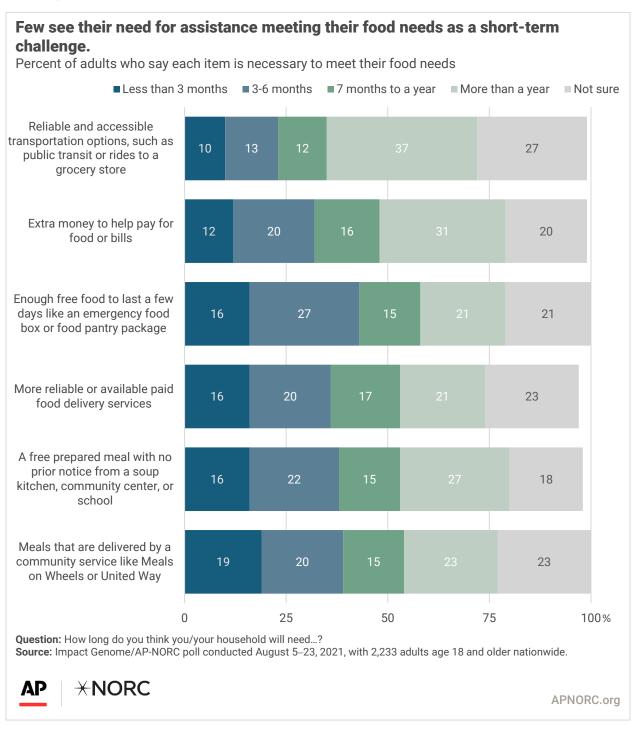
Those who faced challenges getting food in the last year are using various strategies to cope with those challenges. The most common strategies are buying nonperishable foods that don't go bad quickly, buying cheaper foods, and managing finances, with more than 8 in 10 at least somewhat likely to employ each. Two-thirds are at least somewhat likely to eat less to stretch the food they have.



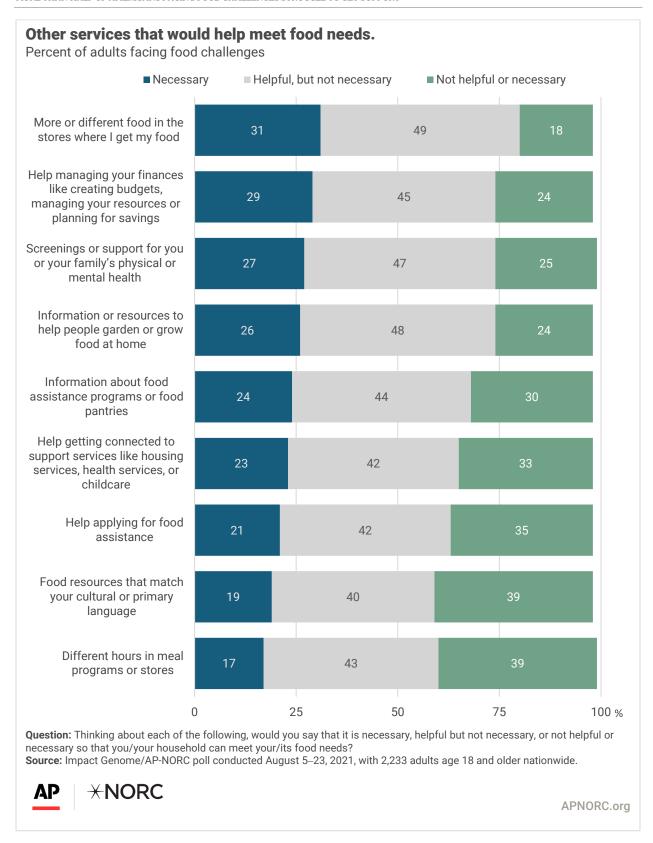
But when asked what would help resolve their food challenges, people most commonly answered more money. Fifty percent say extra money to help pay for food or bills would be necessary, and another 39% say it would be helpful but not necessary. More reliable transportation and more free food are also necessary for more than a quarter of those facing food challenges. Fewer think free prepared meals or meals delivered by a community service would be necessary, but more than half think they would be helpful.



These forms of assistance would not be short-term stopgaps. Among those who say each is necessary, fewer than two in ten say they would need it for less than three months. Many are unsure how long they would need assistance. More reliable transportation is especially likely to be a long-term necessity.



There are other ways aside from direct assistance to support people facing challenges with food. A majority say that information about food assistance programs or how to grow food at home and help with finances, applying for food assistance, or connecting with social services, and better options for food where they shop would be necessary or helpful in meeting food needs.



Many households also include someone with a special diet. Fourteen percent have a food allergy or sensitivity, 19% need to avoid some foods for a health condition like diabetes, 2% have religious restrictions such as kosher or halal, and 7% are vegetarian or vegan.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study, funded by Impact Genome with support from The Albertsons Companies Foundation, was conducted by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Data were collected using AmeriSpeak®, NORC's probability-based panel designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. During the initial recruitment phase of the panel, randomly selected U.S. households were sampled with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame and then contacted by U.S. mail, email, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings. Staff from NORC at the University of Chicago, The Associated Press, and Impact Genome collaborated on all aspects of the study.

Interviews for this survey were conducted between August 5 and 23, 2021, with adults age 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Panel members were randomly drawn from AmeriSpeak, and 2,233 completed the survey-2,011 via the web and 222 via telephone. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish, depending on respondent preference. Respondents were offered a small monetary incentive (\$2) for completing the survey.

The final stage completion rate is 22.6%, the weighted household panel response rate is 19.1%, and the weighted household panel retention rate is 75%, for a cumulative response rate of 3.2%. The overall margin of sampling error is +/- 3.2 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level, including the design effect.

In addition, Black, Hispanic, respondents from households below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), and respondents from households between 100%-200% FPL were sampled at a higher rate than their proportion of the population to support analyses.

Subgroup	Number of completed interviews	Margin of sampling error at the 95% confidence level, including the design effect
Black Americans	583	+/- 5.9 percentage points
Hispanic Americans	567	+/- 6.3 percentage points
Respondents from households below the FPL	512	+/- 5.8 percentage points
Respondents from households between 100% and 200% FPL	768	+/- 5.0 percentage points

Once the sample has been selected and fielded, and all the study data have been collected and made final, a poststratification process is used to adjust for any survey nonresponse and any non-coverage or under- and oversampling resulting from the study-specific sample design. Poststratification variables included age, gender, census division, race/ethnicity, education, and FPL. Weighting variables were obtained from the 2021 Current Population Survey. The weighted data reflect the U.S. population of adults age 18 and over.

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