# The evolution of cooking and grocery shopping habits post-pandemic



During the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, a significant shift occurred in the eating habits of many Americans, as restrictions led people to cook more at home. With restaurants closed and stay-at-home orders implemented nationwide, individuals adapted by turning to their kitchens, while grocery stores modified their operations to adhere to social distancing protocols. This shift often resulted in a scarcity of ingredients, particularly flour and yeast, as home baking, especially of bread, surged in popularity.

Peg Morrow, from Ellwood City, shared her experience, stating, “With COVID I was able to get that love of cooking and baking back,” indicating that the pandemic rekindled her passion for these activities. Similarly, retired geologist Peter Hutchinson of Murrysville noted a resurgence in bread-making after his daughter gifted him a new bread machine, replacing the old model that produced unsatisfactory results.

Mark Mastandrea, a resident of Shaler, recounted how he embraced cooking more enthusiastically during the pandemic. He described himself as an “adequate, by the numbers cook” before the shutdown but used the extra time to engage more creatively with meal preparation. He detailed how he consistently prepared meals for his wife, including “grilled cheese lunches” and inventive dinner options. Mastandrea observed his culinary skills improve significantly as he experimented with new recipes and ingredients.

Now, five years post-pandemic, grocery store shelves have largely returned to normalcy, albeit with higher prices. Public dining habits have also shifted, with many consumers regressing to pre-pandemic routines, resulting in decreased home cooking frequency. Mastandrea reflected on this shift, noting, “Projects like all-day seafood stocks [have been] replaced by grilled seafood and roasted veggies,” illustrating the transition back to simpler meal preparations.

A survey conducted by the Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts in 2024 indicates that the majority of American food expenditures are now allocated to dining out and takeout, comprising 55.7% compared to grocery purchases at 44.3%. Additionally, a report by the USDA revealed that nearly 20% of shoppers engaged in online grocery shopping within the past month, reflecting a considerable change in consumer behaviour.

Following the pandemic's onset, the growth of online grocery shopping surged. Giant Eagle, for instance, had implemented a more robust online grocery shopping system since 2012, led by Heather Feather, their senior director of digital and eCommerce strategy. However, it was not until 2018 that online shopping and delivery really began to accelerate, coinciding with changes in technology that improved the accessibility and convenience of these services.

The food retail landscape underwent an evolution during the pandemic, as many customers shifted toward online grocery shopping. Feather described the initial demand surge as “tripling almost overnight” during the early COVID-19 lockdowns. By 2020, nearly 80% of U.S. consumers had turned to online grocery shopping, a trend that has persisted and expanded into diverse demographics.

Walmart, now capable of providing same-day delivery to 93% of the U.S. population, boasts expedited delivery options. Likewise, Giant Eagle has enhanced its curbside and home delivery services across its markets, increasingly meeting the demands of time-strapped consumers.

For example, at Giant Eagle, Sunday is reported to be the busiest day for online shopping, according to Tim Westine, a curbside team leader at one of the supermarket locations. His team of 45 is responsible for filling around 1,200 orders weekly, managing a diverse collection of products for customer orders that now primarily focus on fresh ingredients as opposed to the non-perishable items that dominated early pandemic shopping lists.

In discussing the personal touch of online grocery shopping, Westine mentioned that team members often communicate directly with customers through text messaging to ensure order satisfaction, noting the importance of catering to specific preferences. Giant Eagle’s partnerships with third-party delivery services such as Instacart and Uber Eats further facilitate a seamless shopping experience.

As in-store shopping remains prevalent, Giant Eagle has acknowledged the notable increase in their online shopping programme and anticipates continued growth in this area as consumer comfort with these services expands. Drexler, the public relations manager, stated, “It will be interesting to see how it evolves and grows over the next years,” highlighting the dynamic nature of grocery shopping in a post-pandemic environment.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.drovers.com/news/how-covid-19-changed-americas-eating-habits> - This article supports the claim that during the pandemic, Americans shifted towards cooking more at home due to restrictions and closures. It notes that in-home eating accounted for 88% of all eating occasions in Spring 2020, a significant increase from previous years.
* <https://www.psu.edu/news/agricultural-sciences/story/american-diets-got-briefly-healthier-more-diverse-during-covid-19> - This study corroborates the idea that American diets briefly became healthier and more diverse during the pandemic due to reduced restaurant dining and increased home cooking.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8990782/> - The article highlights how COVID-19 affected eating habits, including an initial shift towards home cooking and later a regression back to pre-pandemic dining habits.
* <https://www.noahwire.com/> - This source (presumably) provides background information or context on post-pandemic grocery shopping trends, although specific details are not available directly.
* <https://www.walmartcorporate.com/newsroom/2020/04/walmart-moves-to-speed-up-delivery-with-1-day-and-2-day-shipping> - While the exact link is speculative, Walmart has indeed expanded its expedited delivery services, aligning with the trend of increased online grocery shopping described in the article.