# The evolution of cooking and shopping habits during the pandemic



During the early months of the pandemic in 2020, the closure of restaurants and implementation of stay-at-home orders led to a notable shift in the culinary habits of Americans. With home cooking becoming a necessity, individuals greatly increased their time spent in the kitchen, despite encountering challenges sourcing certain ingredients at grocery stores. Grocery retailers modified their operations to ensure social distancing, which further altered shopping behaviours.

Home baking saw a significant resurgence, particularly the art of bread-making. Peg Morrow from Ellwood City reflected on this trend in a communication to the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, stating, “With COVID I was able to get that love of cooking and baking back.” Similarly, retired geologist Peter Hutchinson of Murrysville noted a revival of interest in baking bread, made possible by replacing an old, ineffective bread machine with a modern model. “I have happily been making bread again,” he shared, illustrating the enthusiastic return to culinary activities sparked by the pandemic.

Mark Mastandrea of Shaler, who also embraced cooking during the shutdown, recounted his journey toward enhancing his culinary skills. He remarked, “I was an adequate, by the numbers cook. Many recipes I made were demonstrably good... but I always felt something was missing.” With increased time on his hands, Mastandrea found joy in preparing meals from scratch, transforming daily cooking into an enjoyable routine.

Five years later, the landscape of American cooking habits has noticeably changed again. A 2024 survey by the Auguste Escoffier School of Culinary Arts, informed by USDA data, revealed that 55.7% of food budgets are now allocated to dining out and takeout, compared to 44.3% spent on groceries. Mastandrea observed this transition, noting a shift from elaborate meal preparation to more casual weeknight cooking routines.

Concurrently, online grocery shopping gained significant traction, supported by evolving consumer preferences. Nearly 20% of shoppers of all ages reportedly engaged in online grocery shopping at least once in the preceding month, according to a USDA report. Grocery giants like Giant Eagle and Walmart recognised the potential for convenience, increasing their digital offerings in response to rising demand kickstarted by the pandemic.

Giant Eagle’s senior director of digital and eCommerce strategy, Heather Feather, indicated that the chain had been preparing for this shift as early as 2012. However, it was not until 2018 that improvements in technology made online grocery shopping more accessible. The advent of the pandemic accelerated demand, with Giant Eagle reporting that the volume of online orders surged dramatically almost overnight.

To put this in context, a survey during the early stages of COVID-19 revealed that nearly 80% of American consumers opted for online grocery shopping. Shopping habits shifted significantly, with an increasing number of consumers enjoying the convenience of ordering groceries online. Walmart has enhanced its offerings to include same-day deliveries to 93% of the U.S. population and expedited delivery services within one hour for an additional fee.

The transformation of online grocery shopping has not only changed consumer preferences but has also led to the establishment of dedicated teams within stores to fulfil online orders more efficiently. Tim Westine, a curbside team leader at Giant Eagle, highlighted the effective processes in place, stating, “It’s really a robust process.” Members of the curbside team are capable of fulfilling a substantial number of orders weekly, reflecting the growing prevalence of online grocery shopping.

As customers’ needs have evolved, the types of items ordered have also changed. In the initial days of the pandemic, there was a strong demand for non-perishable items. However, today, shoppers are focused more on ordering fresh produce, meat, and dairy products. Service enhancements such as curbside pickup and home delivery have increased convenience, allowing customers to enjoy similar loyalty benefits as in-store shoppers.

The adaptability of grocery chains to meet changing consumer demands has enabled the growth of online shopping services. As the digital grocery space continues to evolve, Giant Eagle’s public relations manager, Jannah Drexler, expressed interest in observing how online grocery experiences will further develop as consumer comfort with these services increases in the years to come.

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

## References

* <https://www.drovers.com/news/how-covid-19-changed-americas-eating-habits> - This article discusses how COVID-19 changed America's eating habits, particularly noting a significant shift towards in-home eating during the pandemic, which aligns with the increased time Americans spent cooking at home.
* <https://www.psu.edu/news/agricultural-sciences/story/american-diets-got-briefly-healthier-more-diverse-during-covid-19> - This study highlights that American diets became healthier and more diverse as people cooked more at home during the pandemic, reflecting the shift towards home cooking due to restaurant closures.
* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8575330> - This research examines the impacts of COVID-19 on food consumption patterns globally, including increased home cooking due to lockdowns, which mirrors the trend observed in the U.S.
* <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-04-16/coronavirus-turns-americans-into-home-bakers> - Although the specific article is not available, similar reports indicate that the pandemic saw a resurgence in home baking, particularly bread-making, as people had more time at home.
* <https://www.supermarketnews.com/online-retail/walmart-expands-grocery-delivery-to-93-of-us-population> - This article details Walmart's enhanced grocery delivery services, reflecting the surge in online grocery shopping during and after the pandemic, as consumers sought convenience.