

RESEARCH BRIEF #47

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Staying at Home: How Well Did Americans Maintain Their Health Behaviors during COVID-19?

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The COVID-19 pandemic has upended lives around the globe, affecting peoples' schedules, routines, and health behaviors. The Monday Campaigns - a public health initiative that promotes sustainable behavior change by dedicating each Monday to health - conducted a short survey with over 1,000 U.S. adults in November 2020 to better understand whether people changed their health behaviors and goals during the pandemic.

Findings suggest that people have been less consistent with healthy behaviors during the pandemic, but those who reported positive feelings about Monday as a fresh start were more likely to report that they were in better health.

This brief summarizes the findings from the survey and provides tips for getting back into healthy habits as we come out of the pandemic.

People's Sense of Schedule Eroded during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Survey results show that U.S. adult's sense of schedules and routines eroded during COVID-19. Nearly half (46%) of respondents said it is extremely or very true that they sometimes lose track of what day of the week it is, 41% reported that they miss having weekly plans to look forward to, and 38% said that lack of a structured weekly schedule makes it harder to accomplish their goals.

KEY FINDINGS

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, people's sense of schedule eroded: 46% reported they sometimes lose track of the day of the week, 41% said they miss having weekly plans to look forward to, and 38% agreed that lack of structure makes it more difficult to accomplish their goals.
- Lack of motivation and routine negatively affected health behaviors during the pandemic: over 40% of respondents reported sitting around more and eating or snacking more frequently than before COVID-19.
- Those with a positive feeling about Monday as a fresh start reported being in better health during the pandemic.

Lack of Motivation and Routine Negatively Affected Health Behaviors during the Pandemic

Respondents gave multiple reasons for not meeting their health goals during the pandemic, including sitting around more than usual (44%), eating or snacking more frequently (41%), feeling unmotivated (41%), and losing their regular routine (34%). Respondents generally reported feeling less healthy since the onset of the pandemic, with those rating their health as good or excellent dropping from 64% to 57%. Respondents also reported that they are less likely to be engaging in physical activity: 28% reported exercising less often, whereas 16% reported exercising more often. COVID-19 also affected our diets: 86% of respondents listed at least one item of junk food that was hard to resist. However, 34% of respondents also reported eating more fruits and vegetables than they had prior to COVID-19.



Monday Offers a Fresh Start

Respondents who reported having positive feelings about Monday also reported being in better health during the pandemic. Those who view Mondays as a fresh start (31%) rate their health highest: 71% rate it excellent or good. This was significantly higher than respondents who indicated that Mondays are no different than any other day of the week (55% rated their health as excellent or good) or that they dread Mondays (51% rated their health as excellent or good).

These findings add to the evidence that viewing the beginning of the week positively can motivate healthier behaviors, even during a pandemic. Previous research from The Monday Campaigns shows that people are more likely to set health goals at the beginning of the week. Those who begin healthy activity at the beginning of the week are also more likely to maintain those behaviors throughout the rest of the week.¹ The Monday refresh is a reminder to recommit to healthy goals each week as a way to maintain a healthy lifestyle. As we come out of the COVID-19 pandemic, here are some tips to help you sustain healthy behaviors:

1. Set realistic goals.
2. Break goals down into steps.
3. Make a weekly plan.
4. Do it with others.
5. Hit refresh if you relapse.

For more information about The Monday Campaigns and the Monday refresh, visit:

<https://www.mondaycampaigns.org/the-healthy-monday-refresh>

Data and Methods

The Monday Campaigns commissioned a survey of U.S. adults in November 2020 to assess health behaviors during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was conducted by Researchscape International from November 10 to 11, 2020. 1,063 respondents completed the survey. Percentages reported in this brief were weighted to be representative of the overall population by age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, voting registration status, political ideology, evangelical religious orientation, and U.S. Census region. To obtain more information about the methodology or the sample, contact the authors.

References

1. Data Decisions Group. (2019). Nationally representative survey of 1,000 online adult respondents. Retrieved June 8, 2020, from <https://www.mondaycampaigns.org/research>

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The authors are affiliated with The Monday Campaigns, a public health initiative associated with leading health institutions that seeks to reduce the incidence of preventable diseases by dedicating every Monday to health.

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The mission of the SU Lerner Center for Public Health Promotion is to improve population and community health through research, education, and outreach focused on the social, spatial, and structural determinants of physical, mental, and behavioral health and health disparities.

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