



**Obesity Action
Scotland**

Healthy weight for all

IMPACT OF COVID-19 CONTROL MEASURES ON HEALTH DETERMINANTS – AN OVERVIEW (2020-2021)

Analysis Commissioned by Obesity Action Scotland

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Background

In March 2021 Obesity Action Scotland commissioned the Diffley Partnership to carry out a representative poll among adults in Scotland to understand the continued effects of the coronavirus outbreak on health determinants, especially relating to diet and physical activity, a year after control measures were first introduced. This was a follow up to polling which was undertaken in May 2020.

The polling fieldwork was carried out online between 24th and 26th March 2021. The survey was conducted among 2,244 adults (aged 16+) in Scotland.

This report follows the Summary Report “*Impact of Coronavirus Control Measures on a Selection of Health Determinants in Scotland – A Year On*” and the Top-line Results presenting the survey data. It describes results of further analysis of the data, exploring stories within it.

Many of the changes that were observed in May 2020 continued through into 2021.

Story 1: Eating out of boredom

Eating out of boredom was the greatest behaviour change that our survey identified in May 2020, and this continued after a year of various COVID-19 lockdown controls. In March 2021 an average of 52% of respondents said they ate more out of boredom since the start of the coronavirus outbreak, which remained relatively unchanged (54% in May 2020). The level of eating out of boredom is different for certain population groups (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Eating out of boredom, by population group

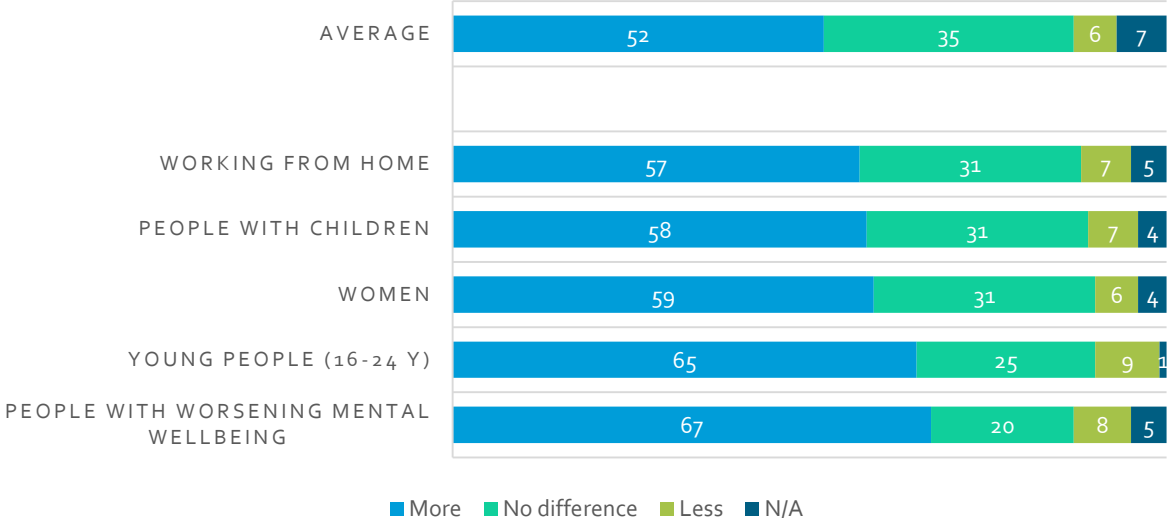
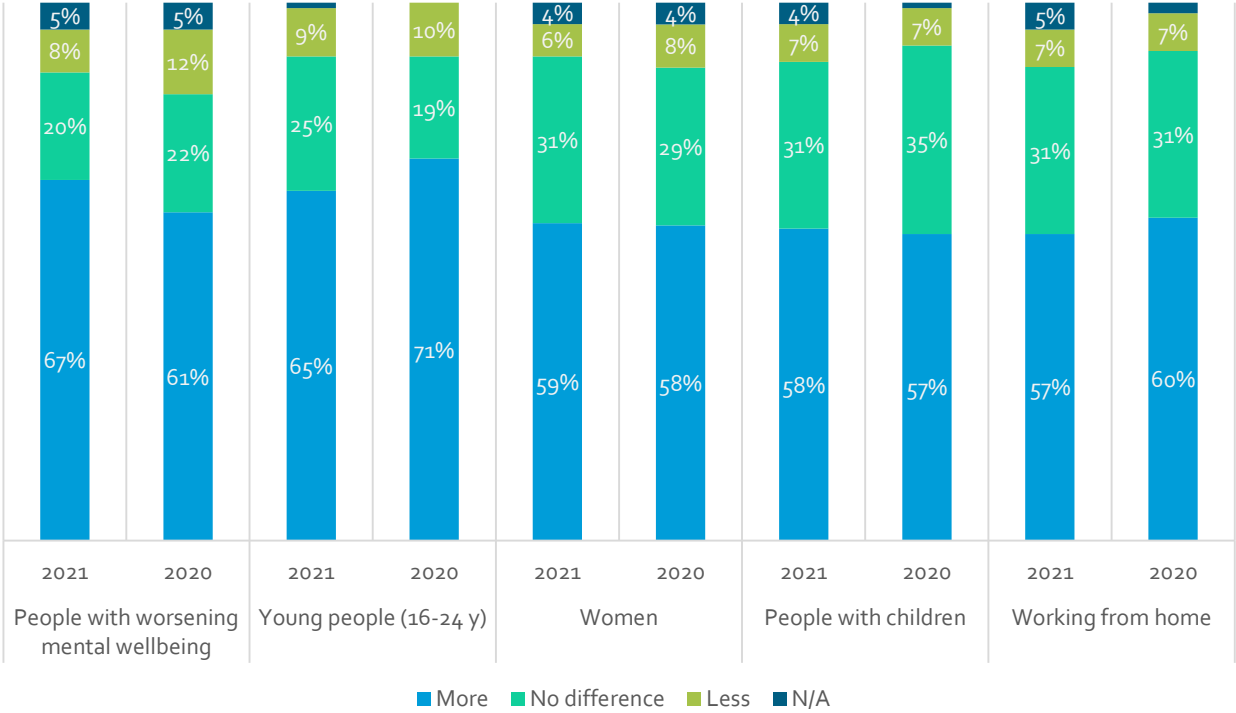


Figure 1.2 overleaf outlines how eating out of boredom has changed for the most affected population groups over that year. The number of young people aged 16 – 24 years old reporting an increase in eating out of boredom fell by 6% between May 2020 to March 2021. On the other hand, the number of people with worsening mental health who say they eat more out of boredom increased by 6% between May 2020 and March 2021.

Figure 1.2: Eating out of boredom, by population group over time



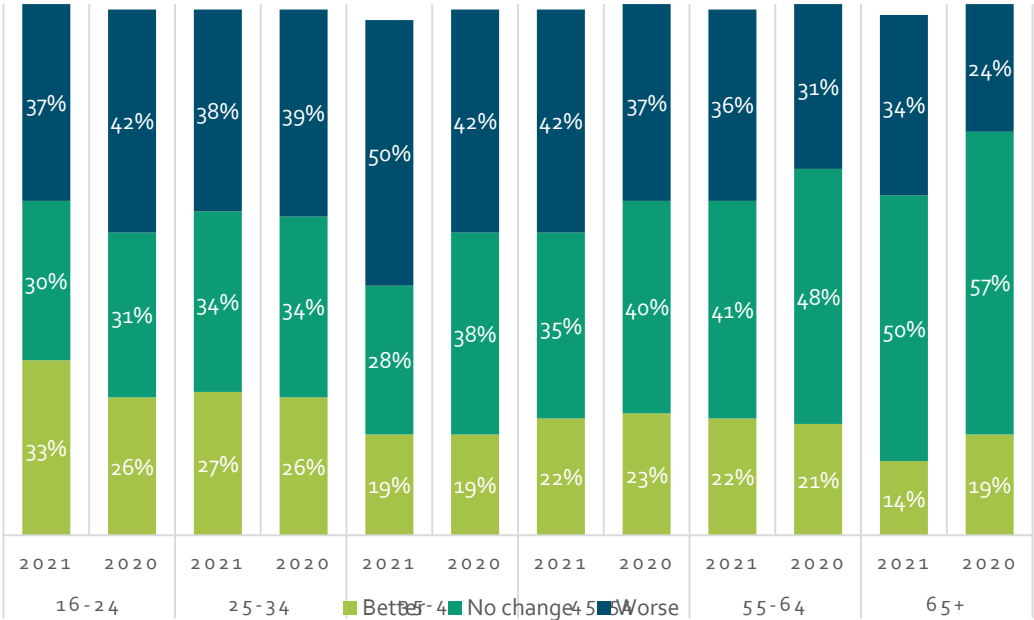
Story 2: Inequitable impact of COVID-19 on health determinants

Our previously published Summary Report *“Impact of Coronavirus Control Measures on a Selection of Health Determinants in Scotland – A Year On”* outlines the impact of COVID-19 on various health determinants, and how this has changed since the outbreak began. The impact was not felt to the same extent by everyone. Some of the population groups continued to be affected by the outbreak of the epidemic more than others, including by age and households where children are present.

Age

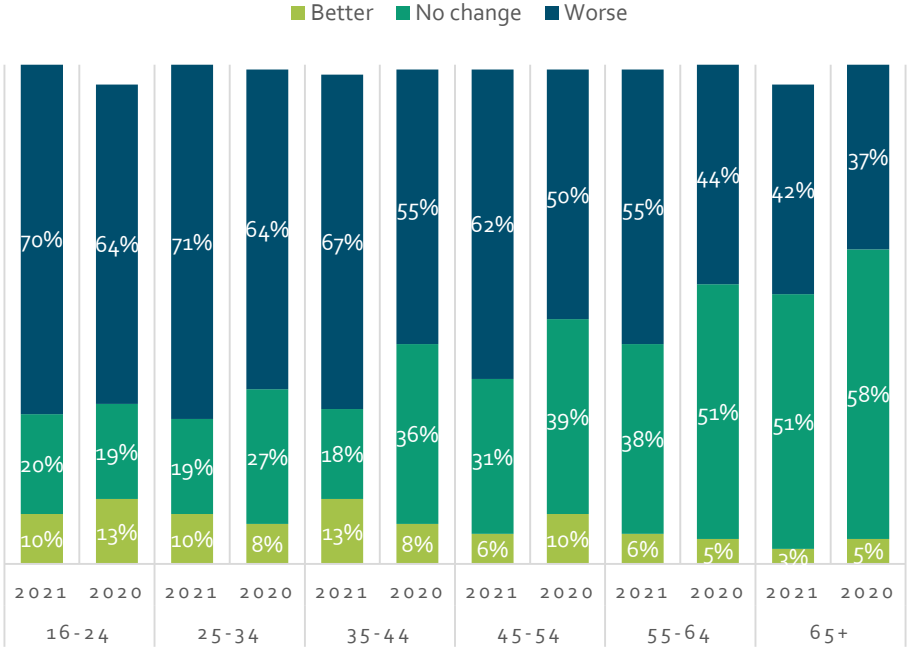
Consistent with findings from the poll when COVID-19 control measures were first implemented, young people are often more affected by lockdown measures and there were clear age-dependent differences in how people were affected. Figure 2.1 below shows the change in diet observed since the coronavirus pandemic. Younger people (16-24) have observed a change to their diet whereas older people (65+) have not (30% no change vs 50%). A worsening diet between May 2020 and March 2021 is most prevalent in those aged 35 to 44 years old, with half (50%) believing their diet has changed for the worse since March 2020.

Figure 2.1: Perceptions of changes in Diet, by age group over time



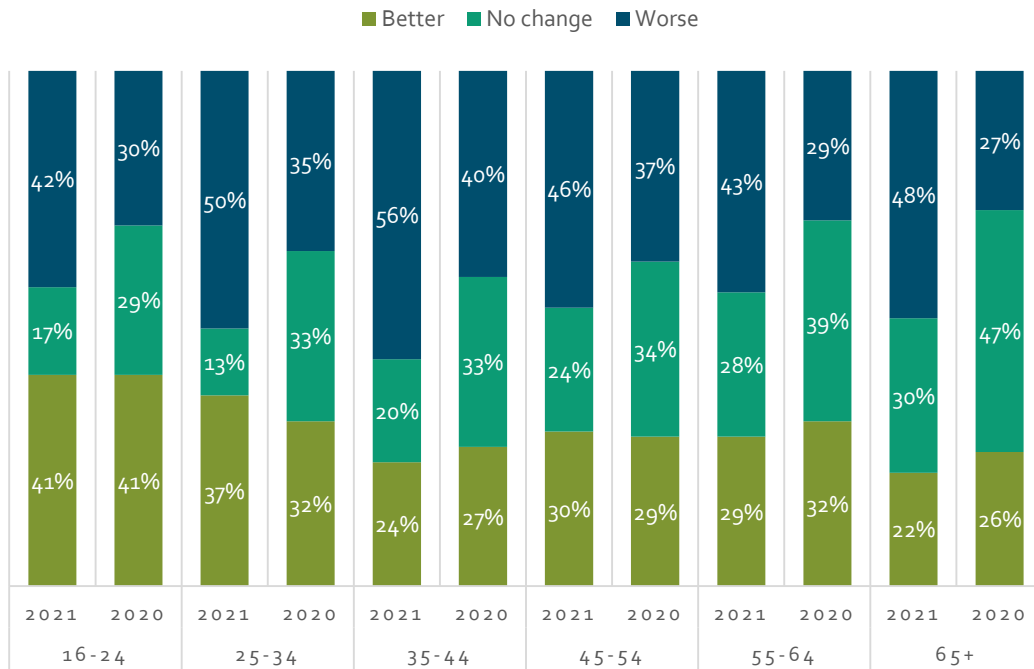
Mental wellbeing continued to show clear age-dependent differences (Figure 2.2). 70% of 16–24-year-olds reported worsening mental wellbeing (an increase from 64% in 2020), while 42% of those over 65 years old said the same (an increase from 37% in 2020).

Figure 2.2: Perceptions of mental wellbeing, by age group over time



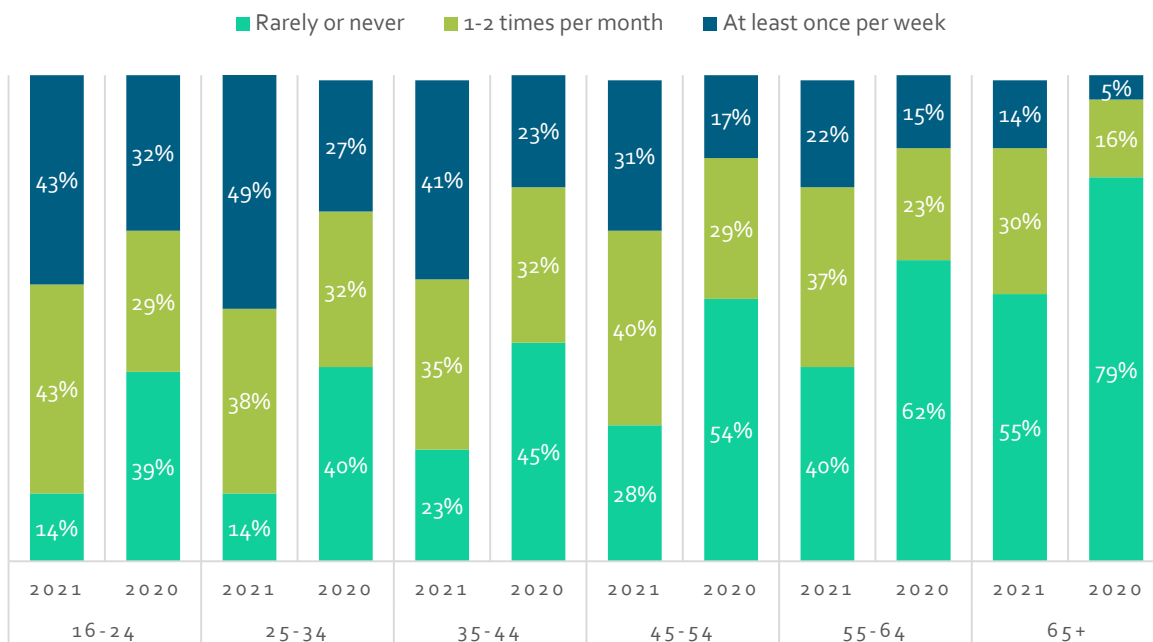
Physical activity also shows clear age dependent differences and variation since lockdown restrictions began in March 2020, as shown in figure 2.3 below. More people have experienced a change in their physical activity across all age groups. Between May 2020 and March 2021 the proportion in each age group reporting worse physical activity levels have increased, and those aged 35 to 44 years old had the biggest change with over half (56%) having a worse level of physical activity. However, young people (16–24 years old) have maintained an increase in their physical activity levels (41% better) and the proportion of people aged 25 to 34 years old reporting better physical activity has also increased (32% in 2020 to 37% in 2021).

Figure 2.3: Perceptions of physical activity, by age group



While young adults (16 – 24 years old) consumed takeaways most often in 2020, people between the ages of 25–34 have changed their behaviours more between 2020 and 2021 year to eat more takeaways per week (Figure 2.4). Almost half (49%) of people aged 25 to 34 years old eat takeaways once per week while a further 38% consume them at least once per month.

Figure 2.4: Frequency of eating takeaways, by age group over time



Less people within older age groups eat takeaways as often (14% of 65+ eat takeaways once per week) however there has been a behaviour shift observed. Between May 2020 to March 2021 the proportion of people aged 65+ who ate takeaways 1-2 times per month increased from 16% to 30%.

Households where children are present

There was a change in eating habits observed in households where children were present. 52% reported they ate more confectionary than pre-March 2020, compared to 40% with no children present. There was an insignificant change in those who ate more confectionary between May 2020 and March 2021. Over half of adults with children present at home (52%) reported eating to cheer themselves up (vs 44% where no children are present).

Figure 2.5: Dietary changes in those with children in the household



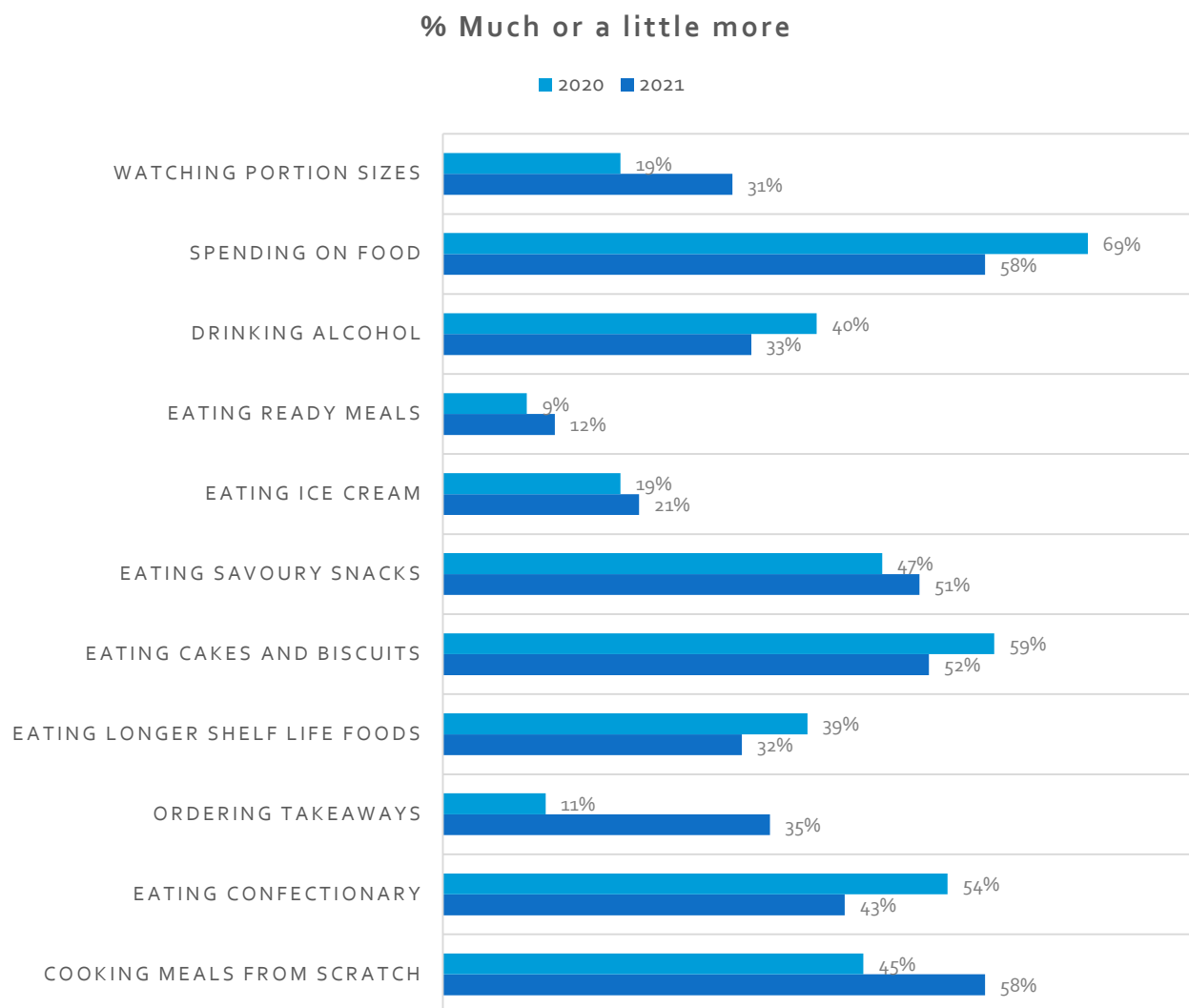
Just under a third (31%) of people without children at home reported eating more savoury snacks whereas around 2 in 5 people with children in the household (42%) reported the same. The biggest difference in eating habits comes from ready meals. In 2020 7% of adults with children present reported eating more ready meals and this proportion increased to 23% in March 2021.

People who were furloughed

The experiences of people with reduced income or those who were working from home were in line with the national average. However, people who were placed on the government's furlough scheme have changed their behaviours most over time. Figure 2.6 outlines the changes seen in this group.

The biggest reported increase for those on furlough was their spending on food. Over two thirds (69%) reported an increase during the first national lockdown and over half (58%) reported spending more on food in March 2021.

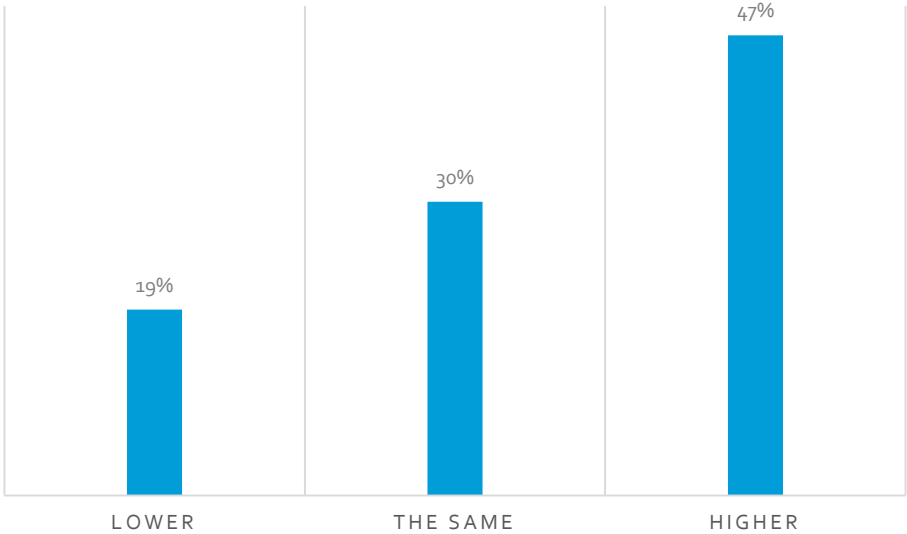
Figure 2.6: Habit changes in those who were on the government furlough scheme, over time



Story 3: Beyond the pandemic

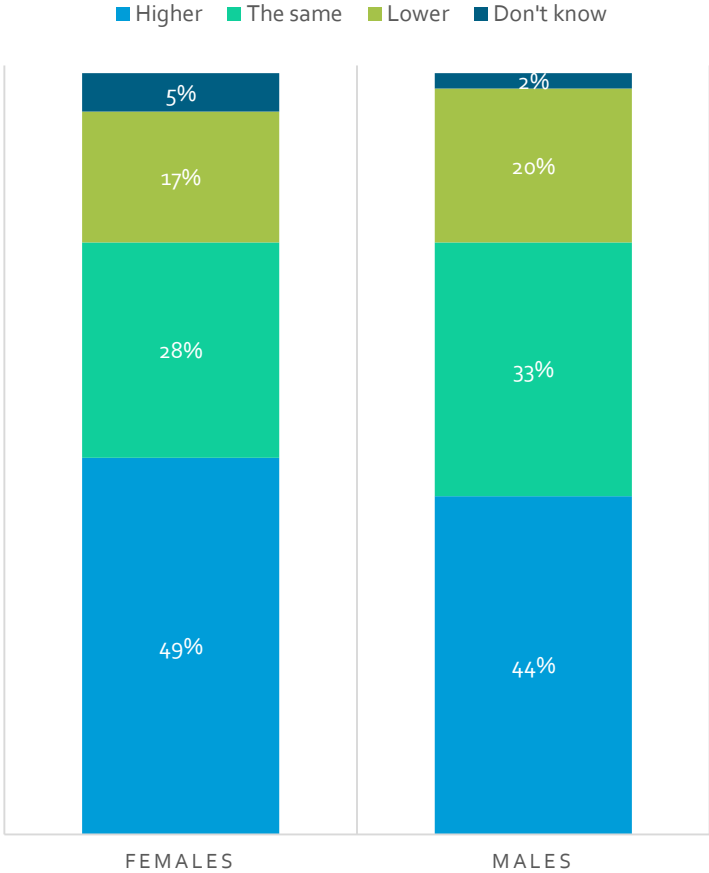
Two thirds (66%) of respondents reported changing bodyweight since the outbreak of pandemic. The majority of these people saw an increase in their bodyweight since lockdown restrictions began, with only 19% of people self-reporting their bodyweight as much lower or a little lower than pre-March 2020 as shown in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1: Reported change in bodyweight



There were some differences in bodyweight observed by gender. Almost half (49%) of females reported a higher body weight since March 2020 (vs 44% of males). A third of males (33%) reported the same bodyweight as March 2020 and one in five (20%) reported a lower bodyweight, as shown in Figure 3.2, overleaf.

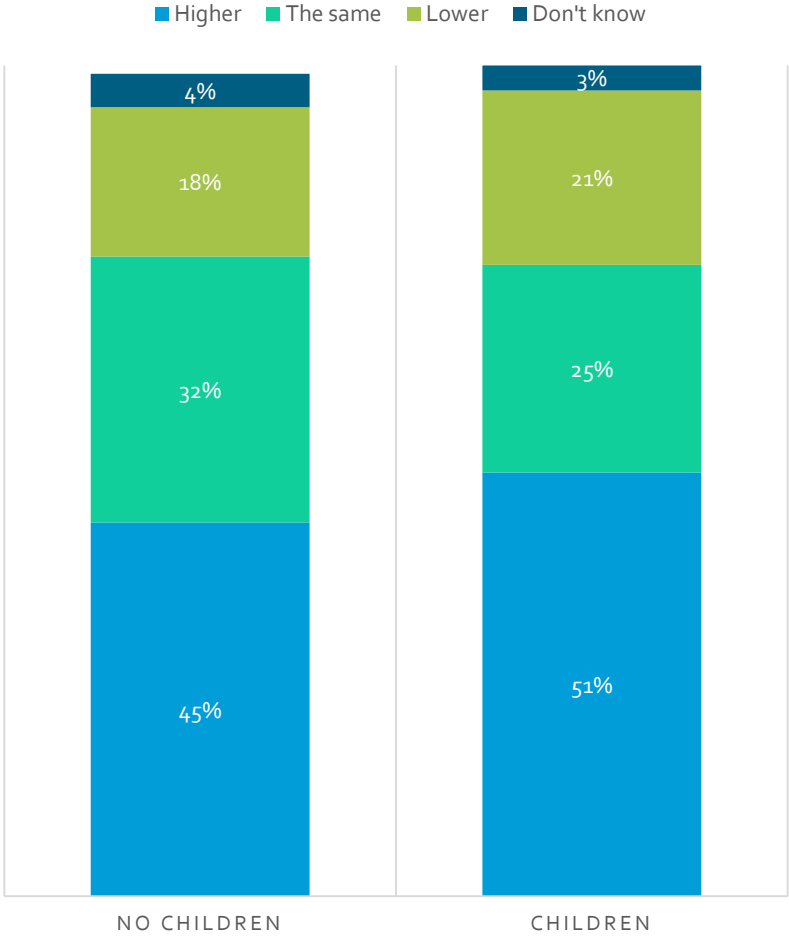
Figure 3.2: Reported change in bodyweight, by gender



There were similar differences observed between adults with children at home and those without, as shown in Figure 3.3 overleaf.

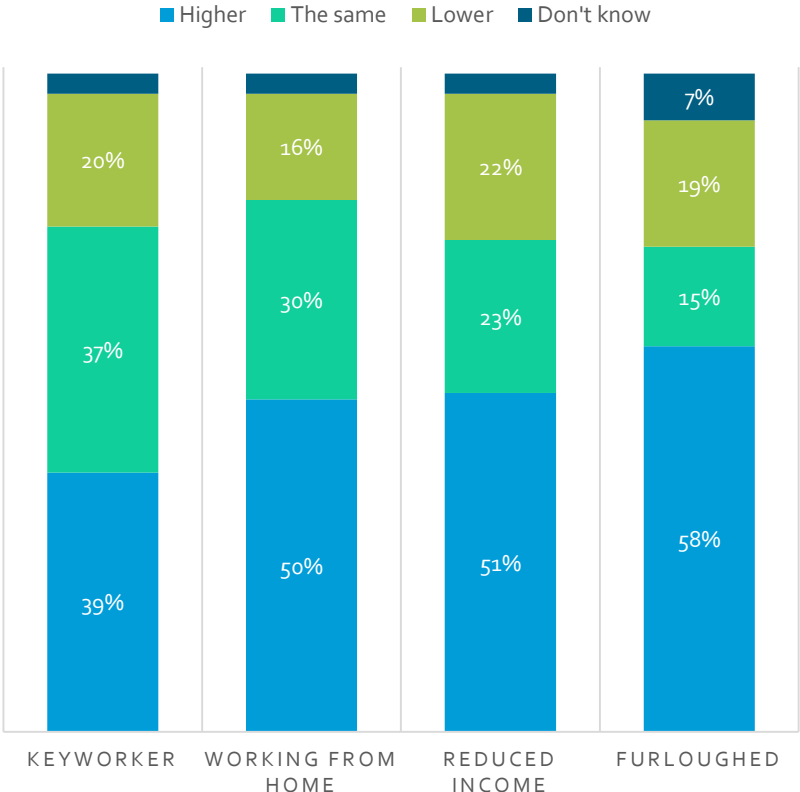
Around a third (32%) of adults with no children at home had the same bodyweight as before lockdown restrictions began, whereas only a quarter (25%) of adults with children at home reported the same bodyweight. Half of adults with children present (51%) reported a higher bodyweight since the beginning of pandemic restrictions and around a fifth (21%) reported a lower bodyweight.

Figure 3.3: Reported change in bodyweight, children in the household



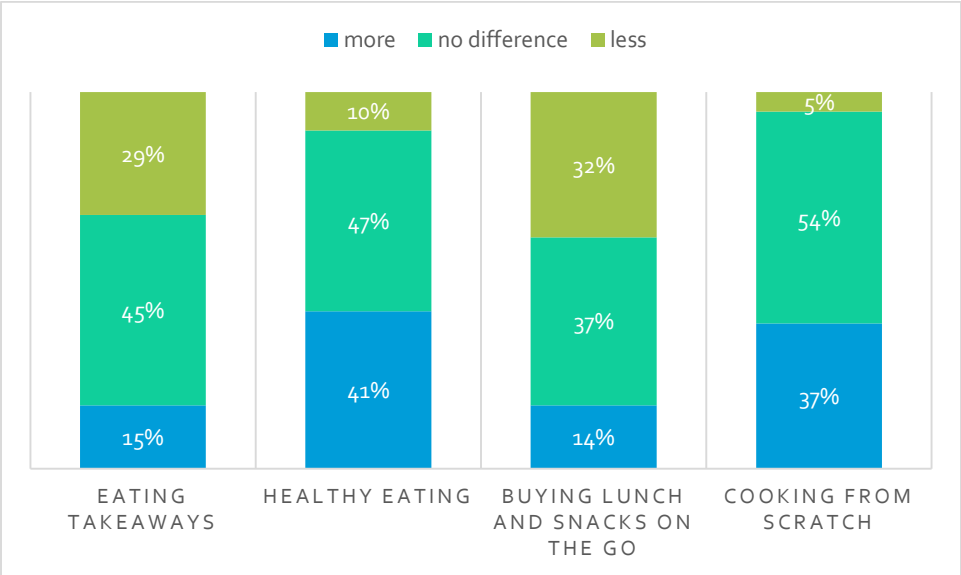
People who faced pandemic hardships also reported changes in bodyweight. More people who experienced furlough reported a higher bodyweight than in March 2020, with over half (58%) experiencing this change. Only 15% of those who experienced furlough had the same bodyweight as March 2020. Keyworkers experienced less of a change as 37% had the same bodyweight as March 2020, and a fifth (20%) report a lower bodyweight. Just under a third (30%) of people who moved to working from home due to the pandemic reported the same bodyweight, with half (50%) reporting an increase.

Figure 3.4: Changes in bodyweight, by pandemic hardships



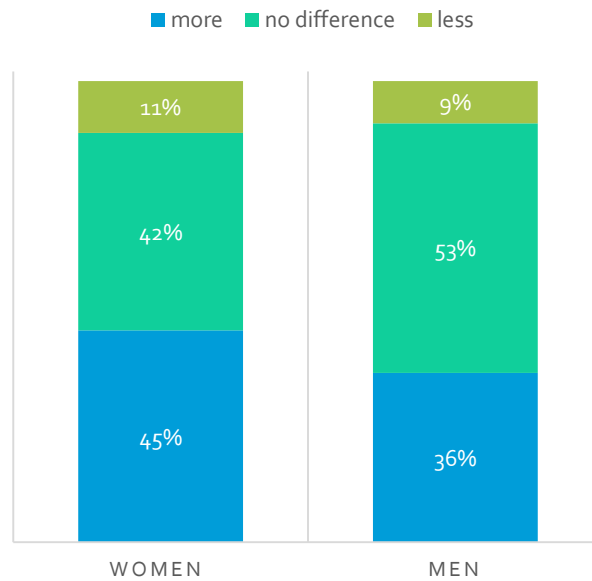
Going forward, two in five people (40%) say they will eat healthier once the pandemic is over compared to pre-March 2020, whereas 47% say there will be no difference to their eating habits. Around a third (32%) of people say they will buy snacks and lunches on the go less than they did before the pandemic as shown in figure 3.5

Figure 3.5: Intentions after the pandemic



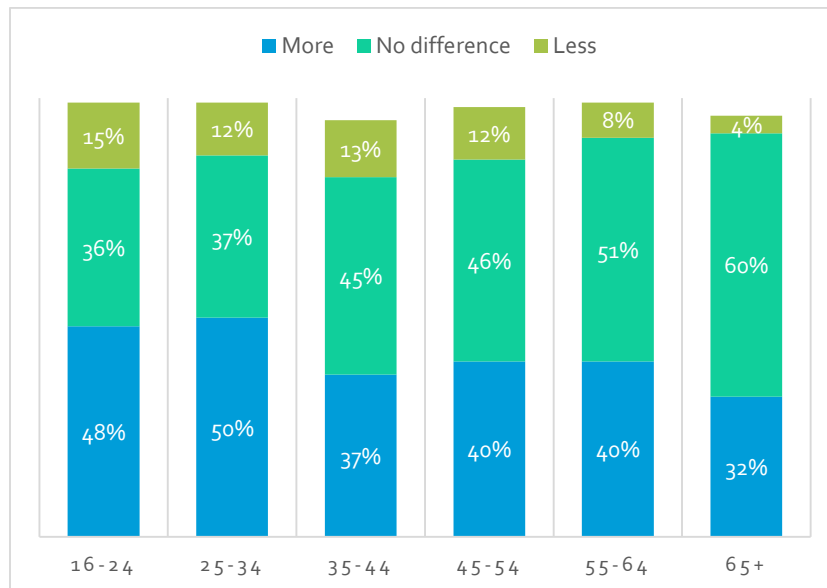
As with changing eating patterns during the pandemic, women and men have different intentions for after the pandemic. Women are more likely to say they will eat healthier than pre-March 2020 than men. Figure 3.6 overleaf.

Figure 3.6: Healthy eating intentions, by gender



There were also some changes in intentions regarding healthy eating across age groups. Around a third (36%) of people aged 16 to 24 years old report no intention to change their eating compared to almost two thirds (60%) of older people (65+). Younger people typically want to eat more healthily after coronavirus restrictions, with around half (48%) having this intention.

Figure 3.7: Healthy eating intentions, by age group



Summary and Conclusions

To summarise, further analysis of the lockdown polling results revealed that:

- Eating out of boredom remains the biggest change in behaviour identified in adults (16+). Those eating out of boredom tend to eat more unhealthy food and takeaways. Some groups, such as women and young adults, ate out of boredom more than others.
- Households where children are present have changed their eating behaviours more than households without children.

We are facing a greater challenge than ever before in improving diet and it is concerning that younger people and those with children in their household changed their diet more often for the worst.

We need to ensure we create the right environment to support everyone, especially vulnerable groups, to access and afford healthy foods. We need to do this with urgency to ensure we set ourselves on the correct dietary trajectory out of the pandemic as soon as possible.

This data reinforces the need for action as it appears most of the impact has been negative.

Note on methods

A sample of 2,244 adults, invited from the ScotPulse panel of over 31,000 adults (16+) in Scotland, completed the survey online. The geographic and demographic balance of the sample is evidenced in the sample breakdown (see Table X below). The sample size allows the ability to undertake sub-group analysis among, for example, different age groups, those from different socioeconomic backgrounds and those with existing health conditions. Overall, the sample allows for robust and reliable estimates, which policymakers can use for decision-making.

This report is accompanied by the Summary Report summarising answers to the questions we asked.

Table 2: Sociodemographic description of the survey sample (n=2,244, weighted)

Sociodemographic variable	Categories	Survey sample, n=2,244
Gender (%)	Male	1,077 (48)
	Female	1,167 (52)
Age (%)	16-24	292 (13)
	25-34	337 (15)
	35-44	359 (16)
	45-54	404 (18)
	55-64	404 (18)
	65+	449 (20)
Social grade (%)	ABC1	1,242 (55)
	C2DE	972 (45)
Number of people in the household (%)	1	320 (14)
	2	953 (42)
	3	493 (22)
	4	372 (17)
	5+	106 (5)
Children in household	No children	1,734 (77)
	1 child	311 (14)
	2 children	154 (7)
	3 children	34 (2)
	4+ children	10 (*)
Local authority area* (%)	North	784 (35)
	East	532(24)
	West	916 (41)
Urban/rural (%)	Urban	1,779 (79)
	Rural	432 (19)



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