

# ALSWH COVID-19 Survey

## Report 7: Survey 7, 22 July 2020

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### Background

The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health (ALSWH) has been collecting comprehensive quantitative and qualitative data from over 57,000 Australian women for 25 years ([alswh.org.au](http://alswh.org.au)). As with the rest of the population, the women in the study have never lived through anything like the current pandemic. To capture this moment in time, a series of fortnightly short online surveys was deployed via email to women in the three ALSWH cohorts born 1989-95, 1973-78, and 1946-51, commencing in late April 2020. The purpose of these surveys was to ascertain women's experiences with COVID-19 testing, their overall wellbeing, and the changes occurring for them during the pandemic.

### Method

COVID-19 Survey 7 was deployed on Wednesday 22 July 2020. Email invitations were sent to 28,709 women: 13,946 from the 1989-95 cohort, 8,503 from the 1973-78 cohort, and 6,260 from the 1946-51 cohort. By 4 August 2020, 7,569 (26%) women had completed Survey 7: 2,091 (28%) from the 1989-95 cohort, 2,594 (34%) from the 1973-78 cohort, and 2,884 (38%) from the 1946-51 cohort.

This report presents data from the 7,314 women who completed the COVID-19 Survey 7 within the first seven days of survey deployment (22 to 28 July 2020 inclusive).

## Findings

### COVID-19 symptoms and testing

Overall, 15% (1,128) of women reported experiencing flu-like symptoms in the previous 14 days, 4% (296) reported that they thought they might have COVID-19, and 8% (566) reported having been tested for COVID-19 within the previous 14 days (see Table 1).

Table 1. Recent flu-like symptoms (within last 14 days) among 7314 ALSWH participants

|   | 1989-95 cohort<br>N=2,034 |      | 1973-78 cohort<br>N=2,506 |      | 1946-51 cohort<br>N=2,774 |     |
|---|---------------------------|------|---------------------------|------|---------------------------|-----|
|   | n                         | %    | n                         | %    | n                         | %   |
| <b>Flu-like symptoms</b>                | 557                       | 27.4 | 374                       | 14.9 | 197                       | 7.1 |
| <b>Thought they might have COVID-19</b> | 165                       | 8.1  | 98                        | 3.9  | 33                        | 1.2 |
| <b>Tested for COVID-19</b>              | 268                       | 13.2 | 185                       | 7.4  | 113                       | 4.1 |

Missing observations were included in the denominators.

Missing data for Flu-like symptoms: 1989-95 cohort n=4; 1973-78 cohort n=6; 1946-51 cohort n=20.

Missing data for Thought they might have COVID-19: 1989-95 cohort n=8; 1973-78 cohort n=8; 1946-51 cohort n=20.

Missing data for Tested for COVID-19: 1989-95 cohort n=4; 1973-78 cohort n=9; 1946-51 cohort n=25

Of the 1,183 women who reported that they had flu-like symptoms or thought they might have COVID-19 within the past 14 days, nearly one third (32%) reported that they had been tested for COVID-19.

At Survey 7, 20% of women reported having ever been tested for COVID-19 (n=1,444). Among these women, 73% (1,059) of women reported one COVID-19 test, and 26% (373) of women reported more than one COVID-19 test (12 women did not report number of tests).

## Weight during the COVID-19 crisis

### Change in weight

Overall, nearly half (49%) of women thought they had gained weight, 37% thought their weight had stayed the same, and about 13% of women believed they had lost weight since the COVID-19 crisis began. Only 8% thought they had gained a lot of weight, whereas 41% thought they had gained a little weight. Conversely, only 1% of women thought they had lost a lot of weight, with 12% thinking they had lost a little weight.

Older women were more likely than younger women to think that their weight had stayed the same since the COVID-19 crisis began, with 48% of women aged 69-74 reporting no change in weight (see Figure 1). Women aged 25-31 and those aged 42-47 were more likely than women aged 69-74 to believe they had gained weight (54% and 56% versus 40%, respectively). The youngest women were also most likely to believe they had lost weight, compared to women aged 42-47 and those aged 69-74 (17% versus 14% and 11%, respectively)

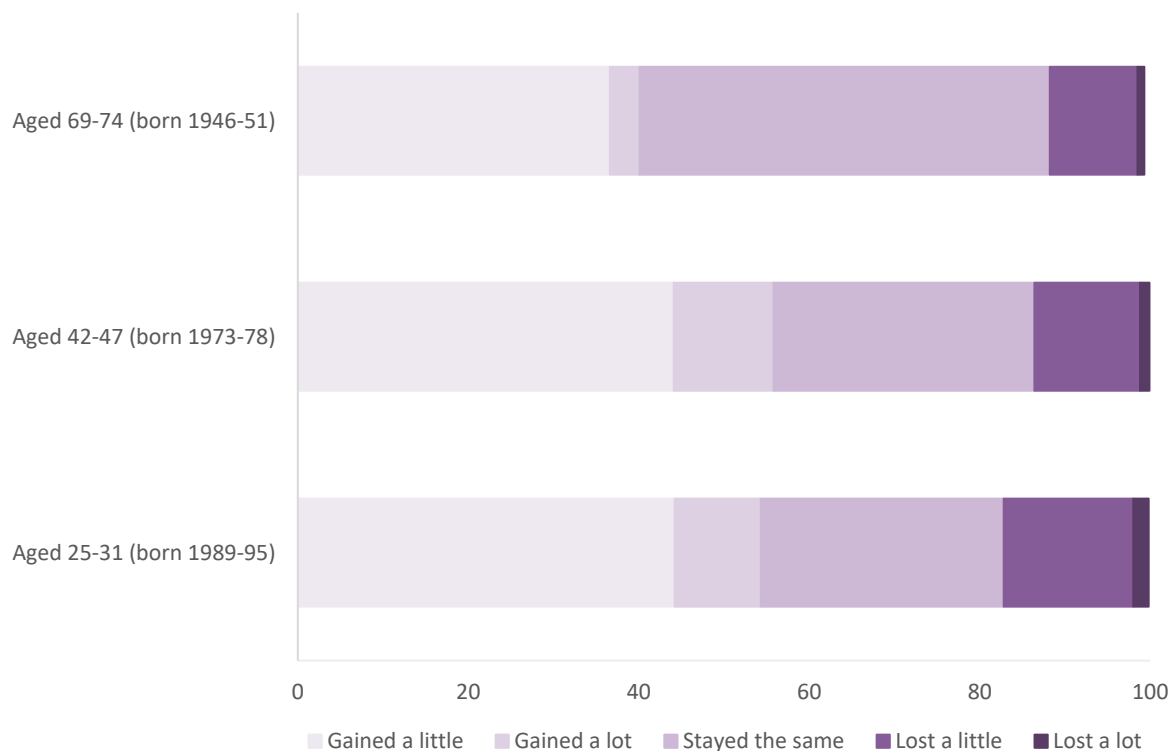


Figure 1. Perceived change in weight since the COVID-19 crisis began among women aged 25-31 (n=2,031), 42-47 (n=2,502) and 69-74 (n=2,756).

## Appetite during the COVID-19 crisis

The majority (71%) of women reported that their appetite had not changed since the COVID-19 crisis started. However, nearly one in five women (19%) said their appetite increased, with only 9% reporting a smaller appetite.

Women aged 25-31 reported more changes in their appetite compared to women aged 42-47 and those aged 69-74 (see Figure 2). Two in five (40%) of the youngest women had a change in appetite, compared to 29% of women aged 42-47 and 20% of women aged 69-74.

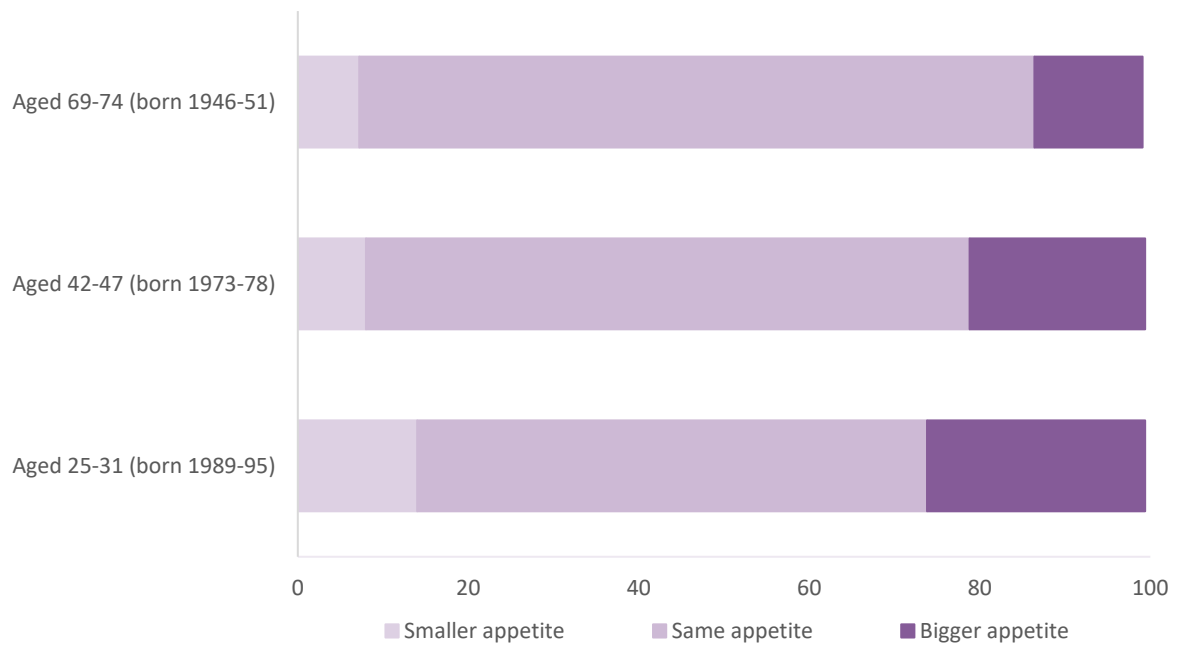


Figure 2. Perceived change in appetite since the COVID-19 crisis began among women aged 25-31 (n=2,023), 42-47 (n=2,488) and 69-74 (n=2,748).

## Food consumption during the COVID-19 crisis

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of women reported that they ate more or less of certain foods during the COVID-19 crisis, with only 22% of women reporting stability in their food consumption of the foods listed below.<sup>1</sup> Changes in food consumption were more commonly reported by women aged 25-31 (87%) than by women aged 42-47 (76%) and women aged 69-74 (63%).

### Fruit and vegetables

Women aged 69-74 reported that compared to their fruit consumption prior to the COVID-19 crisis, they were more likely to consume more fruit (21%) rather than less (6%) during the crisis (see Table 2). The opposite pattern was reported by women aged 25-31 and those aged 42-47, who reported that they were more likely to consume less fruit (22% and 18%, respectively) rather than more (16% and 11%, respectively).

Nearly 18% of all women reported that they ate more vegetables than they had prior to the COVID-19 crisis, with 11% reporting that they ate less. One in five women aged 69-74 reported eating more vegetables during the COVID-19 crisis compared to before the crisis (see Table 2). Women aged 25-31 were more likely to report a decrease in their vegetable intake (18%) compared to women aged 42-47 (13%) and women aged 69-74 (5%).

Table 2. Perceived change in fruit and vegetable consumption since the COVID-19 crisis began among 7314 ALSWH participants

|                   | 1989-95 cohort<br>N=2,034<br>% | 1973-78 cohort<br>N=2,506<br>% | 1946-51 cohort<br>N=2,774<br>% |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Fruit</b>      |                                |                                |                                |
| Less than before  | 21.6                           | 18.3                           | 6.4                            |
| Same as before    | 59.5                           | 67.1                           | 68.0                           |
| More than before  | 15.8                           | 11.4                           | 21.0                           |
| <b>Vegetables</b> |                                |                                |                                |
| Less than before  | 18.2                           | 12.9                           | 4.8                            |
| Same as before    | 61.7                           | 69.6                           | 70.0                           |
| More than before  | 17.1                           | 14.3                           | 20.7                           |

Missing observations were included in the denominators.

Missing data for fruit: 1989-95 cohort n=63; 1973-78 cohort n=80; 1946-51 cohort n=127.

Missing data for vegetables: 1989-95 cohort n=61; 1973-78 cohort n=82; 1946-51 cohort n=127.

<sup>1</sup> Note: 4% of women had missing data, less than 0.5% reported contradictory data of both consuming more and less. Contradictory data for all variables was less than 0.5% and was set to missing.

## Discretionary foods and drinks

The biggest perceived change in food consumption overall during the COVID-19 crisis was related to discretionary foods. While 11% of women overall reported eating less pastries, chips, biscuits, ice-cream, cakes and confectionary, over a third (37%) of women reported eating more of these foods. Slightly more women reported that they ate less fast food or takeaway (22%) compared to those who reported eating more (20%). A similar proportion of women reported a reduction in their consumption of sugary drinks (12%) as those reporting an increased consumption (11%).

Half of women aged 25-31 (50%) reported eating more pastries, chips, biscuits, ice-cream, cakes and confectionary, compared to 40% of women aged 42-47 and 24% of women aged 69-74. There was a similar trend with younger women being more likely to report increases in the consumption of fast food and takeaway (41%, 20%, and 3%, respectively), as well as increases in sugary drink consumption (21%, 11%, and 3%, respectively).

Table 3. Perceived change in discretionary food and drink consumption since the COVID-19 crisis began among 7,314 ALSWH women

|   | 1989-95 cohort<br>N=2,034<br>% | 1973-78 cohort<br>N=2,506<br>% | 1946-51 cohort<br>N=2,774<br>% |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <b>Pastries, chips, biscuits, ice-cream, cakes or confectionary</b> |                                |                                |                                |
| Less than before  | 9.5                            | 9.0                            | 12.8                           |
| Same as before  | 37.7                           | 47.3                           | 58.3                           |
| More than before  | 49.6                           | 40.3                           | 24.1                           |
| <b>Fast food or takeaway</b>  |                                |                                |                                |
| Less than before  | 20.2                           | 22.8                           | 21.4                           |
| Same as before  | 35.6                           | 53.4                           | 70.4                           |
| More than before  | 40.9                           | 20.4                           | 3.4                            |
| <b>Sugary drinks</b>  |                                |                                |                                |
| Less than before  | 12.8                           | 10.2                           | 14.1                           |
| Same as before  | 62.9                           | 75.4                           | 78.5                           |
| More than before  | 21.3                           | 11.2                           | 2.9                            |

Missing observations were included in the denominators.

Missing data for pastries, chips, biscuits, ice-cream, cakes or confectionary: 1989-95 cohort n=66; 1973-78 cohort n=83; 1946-51 cohort n=132.

Missing data for fast food or takeaway: 1989-95 cohort n=66; 1973-78 cohort n=84; 1946-51 cohort n=133.

Missing data for sugary drinks: 1989-95 cohort n=61; 1973-78 cohort n=81; 1946-51 cohort n=126.

## Acknowledgements

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