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## Australian adults' experiences of running out of food during COVID-19 pandemic restrictions

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The various COVID-19 lockdowns and restriction periods significantly changed both food accessibility and availability, which considerably impacted food practices of Australians. Food insecurity prevalence increased in Tasmania<sup>(1)</sup>, but data from elsewhere in Australia is scarce and other changes in food shopping habits have not been reported. We aimed to explore Australian adults' self-reported experiences of running out of food, spending on food and food shopping habits during the COVID-19 restriction periods in 2020. An online survey of Australian adults was administered via Qualtrics. Chi-square tests examined bivariate associations between categorical variables (gender, age, change in employment status, education level, main language spoken at home and marital status), and responses to the main research questions. Respondents (n = 764) were predominantly female (86%), primarily from Victoria (48%), with the majority over 55 years of age (57%, mean age [SD] 53.4 [18.1] years). Additionally, half (51%) were not in paid employment. Overall, 11% reported running out of food and not being able to purchase more. There was an association between age and running out of food (4% of the 64–74 and 75+ year old age groups ran out of food compared to 23% of the 18–24 year olds,  $p < 0.001$ , chi square). The most reported reasons for running out of food, out of six provided options, were 'lack of availability in the shops' (74%) and 'lack of money' (34%). There was no association with gender, employment status change, education level, main language spoken at home, or marital status and running out of food. When asked how the amount of money spent on food changed during COVID-19, most respondents (n = 318, 42%) reported spending about the same amount of money as before the pandemic, 284 (37%) reported spending more and 162 (21%) reported spending less on food. About a third of respondents (38%, n = 293) reported buying more food than they needed since the start of COVID-19 and 9% (n = 66) reported wasting more food than usual. This did not differ with age, gender, employment status change, education level, main language spoken at home, or marital status. Nearly two-thirds (63%) reported that they had changed how they bought their food since the start of COVID-19. Of these 75% reported a change in frequency of food shopping and 45% reported a change in the amount of time spent food shopping. Just under half (44%) reported a change in the amount of money spent on food and 42% reported a change in the food bought. The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions caused significant changes to Australians' food procurement and younger people appeared more at risk of food insecurity. Policies that support young people are important to ensure food security in the most vulnerable groups.

### References

1. Kent K, Murray S, Penrose B *et al.* (2020) *Nutrients* **12**(9), 2682.