

## **Most Americans Have Dined Out in the Past Month and, Among Type of Cuisine, American Food is Tops Followed by Italian**

*Slowing past-six-month declines vs.2012 show hope for restaurant industry*

**NEW YORK, N.Y. – April 3, 2013** – Eating out can mean anything from a quick breakfast sandwich picked up at the drive through to a celebratory dinner at the swankiest restaurant in town. Restaurant choices can be driven by passion for food, convenience or the simple fact that you’re famished and this is the place you’re closest to “right now.” But the simple fact is – Americans dine out. A lot.

Looking at specific restaurant types, over three in five U.S. adults (64%) have dined at a fast food restaurant chain in the past month and just over half have dined at a local casual dining establishment (54%) and a casual dining restaurant chain (52%). Fewer have dined at either a local fine dining restaurant (18%) or a fine dining restaurant chain (9%), while only one in ten Americans (10%) have not dined at any of these types of restaurants in the past month.

These are some of the results of *The Harris Poll* of 2,496 adults surveyed online between February 13 and 18, 2013 by [Harris Interactive](#).

Suburban Americans are more likely to have visited a casual dining restaurant chain (57%) than their urban and rural counterparts (both 47%). Additionally, Urban and Suburban Americans are both more likely than those in rural areas to have visited a local fine dining restaurant (23%-19%-10%) or a fine dining restaurant chain (11%-9%-5%) within that timeframe.

While it may not come as a surprise that those with children under 18 in the household are more likely than those without to have visited a fast food restaurant chain within the past month (73%-61%), it may surprise some that they are also more likely to have visited a fine dining restaurant chain within that time (13%-7%).

### **Changes in dining out behavior**

Americans appear to be cutting back in how often they eat out; when asked whether they have eaten out more or less frequently at the same list of restaurant types over the past six months, “less frequently” responses consistently outpace “more frequently” ones:

- Fast food restaurant chain (26% less, 14% more)
- Local casual dining restaurant (20% less, 14% more)
- Casual dining restaurant chain (24% less, 11% more)
- Local fine dining restaurant (21% less, 7% more)
- Fine dining restaurant chain (23% less, 4% more)

However, it is worth noting that “less frequently” mentions have declined across all categories, in most cases considerably so, when compared to March 2012 results:

- Fast food restaurant chain (36% 2012, 26% 2013)

- Local casual dining restaurant (32% 2012, 20% 2013)
- Casual dining restaurant chain (34% 2012, 24% 2013)
- Local fine dining restaurant (27% 2012, 21% 2013)
- Fine dining restaurant chain (26% 2012, 23% 2013)

### Factors in Choosing a Restaurant

There are multiple factors driving Americans' choices between the restaurants available to them, with those most frequently identified as important including good prices (90%), the mood they are in (for either type of cuisine or type of food – 86%), having a specific menu item they enjoy (84%), a convenient location (83%) and a broad variety of menu items (78%). The majority also consider special offers (59%) and healthy menu items that fit a dietary need (56%) to be important.

Two things the majority of Americans say are not important when choosing a restaurant are choosing the same restaurant when going out for a meal (56%) and a restaurant with a menu that usually has new items to choose from (57%).

Gen Xers (93%) are more likely than any other generational segment (86% Echo Boomers, 85% Baby Boomers, 82% Matures) to indicate that their mood is an important factor in choosing a restaurant. Additionally, Gen Xers (63%) and baby Boomers (62%) are more likely than either Echo Boomers (54%) or Matures (52%) to consider special offers to be important.

Matures are less likely than any other generational group to rate healthy menu items (56% EB, 56% GX, 55% BB, 45% M) and usually having new items to choose from (46% EB, 46% GX, 41% BB, 33% M) as important.

### Preferred cuisine

American adults have their choice of a multitude of different cuisines when it comes to dining out these days. Depending on region, options can vary from the everyday to the exotic: from pasta to poutine, from BLT's to bahn mi's, from steak medium rare to salad Nicoise. But, it's tough to argue with the food we are most familiar with; as such, if faced with going to a restaurant and eating a single type of food, American food would be the preference for the highest percentage of U.S. adults (31%). Italian (23%) is the next most popular choice, followed by Mexican (16%) and Chinese (14%).

Tastes are largely regional:

- U.S. adults living in the West (22%) are less likely than those in any other region (34% East, 34% Midwest, 32% South) to choose American food.
- Eastern Americans are most likely of any region to choose Italian food (31% East, 21% each Midwest, South & West) and the least likely to choose Mexican (7%-13%-18%-24%).

Additionally, men (35%) are more likely than women (26%) to choose American food.

### So What?

Consumers' restaurant behaviors continue to evolve, as does the country's economic fortunes. Restaurant visits appear to be in decline over recent months, but at the same time this decrease in restaurant visits appears to be leveling off vs. 2012 findings. This trend is surely one the restaurant industry will be watching closely, as will the Harris Poll.

**TABLE 1**  
**TYPES OF RESTAURANTS EATEN AT IN PAST MONTH**  
**By Generation, Gender, Children in HH & Metro Status**

“Please review the following types of restaurants and select the types of restaurant(s) you have eaten out at in the past month for either lunch or dinner?”

Base: U.S. adults

	2012 Total	2013 Total	Generation				Gender		Children <18 in HH		Metro Status		
			Echo Boomers 18-35	Gen Xers 36-47	Baby Boomers 48-66	Matures 67+	Men	Women	Yes	No	Urban	Sub- urban	Rural
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Fast Food Restaurant Chain (i.e. McDonalds, Burger King, Jack in the Box, etc.)	63	<b>64</b>	71	68	61	51	66	62	73	61	64	63	67
Local Casual Dining Restaurant	53	<b>54</b>	52	51	55	61	53	55	50	55	50	56	54
Casual Dining Restaurant Chain (i.e. Applebee’s, Chili’s, Olive Garden, etc.)	50	<b>52</b>	57	52	51	45	50	54	56	51	47	57	47
Local Fine Dining Restaurant	18	<b>18</b>	21	20	14	19	19	17	16	18	23	19	10
Fine Dining Restaurant Chain (i.e. Ruth’s Chris, Morton’s Steak House, etc.)	9	<b>9</b>	14	9	5	7	8	9	13	7	11	9	5
None of these	13	<b>10</b>	8	9	12	11	10	10	8	11	12	10	10

Note: Multiple responses allowed.

**TABLE 2a**  
**CHANGES IN DINING OUT OVER PAST SIX MONTHS**  
**Summary Grid**

“Thinking of how often you have eaten at each of these types of restaurant chain in the past 6 months, would you say you have eaten at this type of restaurant...?”

Base: U.S. adults

	<b>More Frequently (NET)</b>	Much more frequently	Somewhat more frequently	About the same	<b>Less Frequently (NET)</b>	Somewhat less frequently	Much Less frequently	Haven't eaten at this type of restaurant in past 6 months
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Fast Food Restaurant Chain	<b>14</b>	6	9	47	26	13	12	13
Local Casual Dining Restaurant	<b>14</b>	5	9	50	20	11	9	16
Casual Dining Restaurant Chain	<b>11</b>	4	8	48	24	13	10	17
Local Fine Dining Establishment	<b>7</b>	2	5	31	21	9	11	42
Fine Dining Restaurant Chain	<b>4</b>	2	3	26	23	10	13	47

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 2b**  
**CHANGES IN DINING OUT OVER PAST SIX MONTHS**  
**Tracking**

“Thinking of how often you have eaten at each of these types of restaurant chain in the past 6 months, would you say you have eaten at this type of restaurant...?”

*Summary of Somewhat/Much More Frequently & Somewhat/Much More Frequently*

Base: U.S. adults

	<b>MORE Frequently</b>		<b>About the same</b>		<b>LESS Frequently</b>		<b>Haven't eaten at this type of restaurant in past 6 months</b>	
	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Fast Food Restaurant Chain	12	<b>14</b>	39	<b>47</b>	36	<b>26</b>	12	<b>13</b>
Local Casual Dining Restaurant	12	<b>14</b>	42	<b>50</b>	32	<b>20</b>	14	<b>16</b>
Casual Dining Restaurant Chain	9	<b>11</b>	40	<b>48</b>	34	<b>24</b>	17	<b>17</b>
Local Fine Dining Restaurant	6	<b>7</b>	27	<b>31</b>	27	<b>21</b>	39	<b>42</b>
Fine Dining Restaurant Chain	5	<b>4</b>	24	<b>26</b>	26	<b>23</b>	46	<b>47</b>

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 2c**  
**CHANGES IN DINING OUT OVER PAST SIX MONTHS – “More Frequently” Summary**  
**By Generation, Gender, Children in HH & Metro Status**

“Thinking of how often you have eaten at each of these types of restaurant chain in the past 6 months, would you say you have eaten at this type of restaurant...?”

*Summary of Somewhat/Much More Frequently*

Base: U.S. adults

	Total	Generation				Gender		Children <18 in HH		Metro Status		
		Echo Boomers 18-35	Gen Xers 36-47	Baby Boomers 48-66	Matures 67+	Men	Women	Yes	No	Urban	Sub-urban	Rural
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Fast Food Restaurant Chain	<b>14</b>	24	14	9	6	16	13	20	13	20	13	12
Local Casual Dining Restaurant	<b>14</b>	20	8	12	13	15	13	15	14	15	14	13
Casual Dining Restaurant Chain	<b>11</b>	18	10	7	10	11	11	16	10	11	12	10
Local Fine Dining Restaurant	<b>7</b>	14	6	4	5	9	6	8	7	8	8	3
Fine Dining Restaurant Chain	<b>4</b>	10	4	1	*	5	4	8	3	6	4	2

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding; \* indicates <.05%

**TABLE 2d**  
**CHANGES IN DINING OUT OVER PAST SIX MONTHS – “Less Frequently” Summary**  
**By Generation, Gender, Children in HH & Metro Status**

“Thinking of how often you have eaten at each of these types of restaurant chain in the past 6 months, would you say you have eaten at this type of restaurant...?”

*Summary of Somewhat/Much Less Frequently*

Base: U.S. adults

	Total	Generation				Gender		Children <18 in HH		Metro Status		
		Echo Boomers 18-35	Gen Xers 36-47	Baby Boomers 48-66	Matures 67+	Men	Women	Yes	No	Urban	Sub-urban	Rural
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Fast Food Restaurant Chain	<b>26</b>	28	24	28	20	23	28	24	26	23	26	27
Casual Dining Restaurant Chain	<b>24</b>	21	29	24	20	23	24	25	23	26	24	21
Fine Dining Restaurant Chain	<b>23</b>	24	24	22	21	23	23	22	23	22	24	22
Local Fine Dining Restaurant	<b>21</b>	21	21	21	20	20	21	22	20	20	21	20
Local Casual Dining Restaurant	<b>20</b>	20	23	22	12	19	21	23	19	19	21	20

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 3a**  
**FACTORS IN CHOOSING A RESTAURANT**  
**Summary Grid**

“Please think about what drives you to choose a restaurant when you go out to eat. How important are each of the following when you choose to eat at a specific restaurant?”

Base: U.S. adults

	<b>Important (NET)</b>	Very Important	Important	<b>Not Important (NET)</b>	Not that important	Not at all important
	%	%	%	%	%	%
A restaurant which has good prices	<b>90</b>	45	45	10	7	2
It depends on the mood I am in for either a type of food (e.g. pasta, salad, sandwiches, burgers) or type of cuisine (e.g. American, Chinese, Thai, etc.)	<b>86</b>	34	52	14	10	4
The restaurant offers a specific menu item that I enjoy	<b>84</b>	29	55	16	12	4
A convenient restaurant location for me	<b>83</b>	30	53	17	13	5
A restaurant menu which has a broad variety of menu items to choose from	<b>78</b>	24	54	22	18	4
A restaurant that usually has special offers	<b>59</b>	18	40	41	31	10
They have healthy menu items that fit my dietary needs	<b>54</b>	18	36	46	31	15
I usually choose the same restaurant when I go out for meal	<b>44</b>	9	35	56	42	14
A restaurant menu which usually has new items to choose from	<b>43</b>	9	34	57	45	12

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 3b**  
**FACTORS IN CHOOSING A RESTAURANT – “Important” Summary**  
**Tracking**

“Please think about what drives you to choose a restaurant when you go out to eat. How important are each of the following when you choose to eat at a specific restaurant?”

*Summary of Very Important + Important*

Base: U.S. adults

	<b>Very Important + Important (NET)</b>	
	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
	%	%
A restaurant which has good prices	90	<b>90</b>
It depends on the mood I am in for either a type of food (e.g. pasta, salad, sandwiches, burgers) or type of cuisine (e.g American, Chinese, Thai, etc.)	84	<b>86</b>
The restaurant offers a specific menu item that I enjoy	81	<b>84</b>
A convenient restaurant location for me	80	<b>83</b>
A restaurant menu which has a broad variety of menu items to choose from	78	<b>78</b>
A restaurant that usually has special offers	59	<b>59</b>
They have healthy menu items that fit my dietary needs	56	<b>54</b>
I usually choose the same restaurant when I go out for meal	41	<b>44</b>
A restaurant menu which usually has new items to choose from	39	<b>43</b>

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**TABLE 3c**  
**FACTORS IN CHOOSING A RESTAURANT - "Important" Summary**  
**By Generation, Gender, Children in HH & Metro Status**

"Please think about what drives you to choose a restaurant when you go out to eat. How important are each of the following when you choose to eat at a specific restaurant?"

Base: U.S. adults

	Total	Generation				Gender		Children <18 in HH		Metro Status		
		Echo Boomers 18-35	Gen Xers 36-47	Baby Boomers 48-66	Matures 67+	Men	Women	Yes	No	Urban	Sub-urban	Rural
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
A restaurant which has good prices	<b>90</b>	90	90	91	90	89	92	91	90	88	92	89
It depends on the mood I am in for either a type of food (e.g. pasta, salad, sandwiches, burgers) or type of cuisine (e.g. American, Chinese, Thai, etc.)	<b>86</b>	86	93	85	82	85	88	90	85	84	86	90
The restaurant offers a specific menu item that I enjoy	<b>84</b>	82	85	84	87	82	86	84	84	82	86	83
A convenient restaurant location for me	<b>83</b>	83	82	84	77	82	83	82	83	81	82	85
A restaurant menu which has a broad variety of menu items to choose from	<b>78</b>	76	79	80	74	74	81	83	76	78	79	74
A restaurant that usually has special offers	<b>59</b>	54	63	62	52	53	63	64	57	54	60	60
They have healthy menu items that fit my dietary needs	<b>54</b>	56	56	55	45	45	61	59	52	53	56	49
I usually choose the same restaurant when I go out for meal	<b>44</b>	47	47	41	37	45	42	48	42	44	41	49
A restaurant menu which usually has new items to choose from	<b>43</b>	46	46	41	33	38	47	49	40	42	43	41

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding



**TABLE 4**  
**TYPE OF FOOD MOST LIKELY TO CHOOSE FOR EATING OUT**  
**By Tracking, Region & Gender**

“Thinking of food now, if you had the choice to go out to a restaurant and eat one type of food, which of these are you most likely to choose?”

Base: U.S. Adults

	2012	2013	Region				Gender	
	Total	Total	East	Midwest	South	West	Men	Women
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
American	28	<b>31</b>	34	34	32	22	35	26
Italian	22	<b>23</b>	31	21	21	21	22	24
Mexican	17	<b>16</b>	7	13	18	24	15	16
Chinese	16	<b>14</b>	13	17	13	15	14	15
Japanese	7	<b>5</b>	4	4	5	5	4	6
Middle-Eastern	1	<b>3</b>	2	1	4	4	3	3
Indian	2	<b>2</b>	1	4	1	3	2	3
French	1	<b>1</b>	1	2	1	2	2	1
Other	4	<b>3</b>	4	1	3	4	2	4
None of these	1	<b>2</b>	3	2	2	1	2	2

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding

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### Methodology

This **Harris Poll** was conducted online within the United States between February 13 to 18, 2013 among 2,496 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents’ propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, Harris Interactive avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Interactive surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in the Harris Interactive panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

***These statements conform to the principles of disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.***

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***The Harris Poll*® #18, April 3, 2013**

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**About Harris Interactive**

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