



# The Kitchen Cooking Index

**A report on the nation's cooking  
habits and mealtime trends**

**February 2021**





## Introduction



*Last year, I said that Britain had got cooking again, and this report shows how. It's not that we've turned into a nation of gourmets all of a sudden; more that we're spending, and enjoying, a little more time preparing meals together each week.*

**Alex Whitehouse**  
Chief Executive, Premier Foods

**2020 will rightly be remembered as one of the bleakest and challenging in modern history. But what impact has the pandemic had on the way we think about food and the meals we eat with our families? Has it really been the case that we've seen a revolution in eating habits, or are we simply seeing a quicker evolution of trends we were seeing before Britain went into lockdown?**

This report is our attempt at a national answer to that question. It is not a report about our own business or any of our specific products. Instead, we've cast the net wider, and worked with Kantar and YouGov to look at the nation as a whole. We've taken into account thousands of research findings and insights and carried out new opinion polls to take the nation's temperature on food and cooking. We have measured how people feel about cooking at home, their motivations and habits.

The results are fascinating. Last year, I said that Britain had got cooking again, and this report shows exactly how. It's not that we've turned into a nation of gourmets all of a sudden; more that we're spending, and enjoying, a little more time preparing meals to eat together each week.

On average, one third of UK households have added a dish to their 'go-to' evening meals since the start of the pandemic. Veggie curries, fish and potatoes, and chicken and mash have seen some of the fastest growth. And this isn't some passing trend. More than 91% of people say they intend to do the same amount of cooking, or more, in the year ahead. As well as enjoyment, a big driver of this is the health benefits of cooking at home. 81% of us want to eat more healthily over the coming year.

For me, one of the most striking trends, one we saw before the pandemic and one which will likely continue long after, is the desire for big, bold flavours and tastes. When you look at the key drivers behind dinner time decisions across the UK's 28 million households, the number one factor is taste. People want to find new ways to experiment, without becoming a slave to their kitchens.

This is the first report of its kind we've produced on Britain's cooking habits, and we're hoping to repeat it every year. That way we can share regular and meaningful insights into the nation's cooking habits. We'll call it: The Kitchen Cooking Index.

**Alex**



**73%**

have **enjoyed cooking** at home over the past year

Average number of dishes regularly cooked at home per week rose from

**3.6 to 4.0**

the **biggest increase** in five years

**46%**

increase in **plant-based meals**

**91%**

intend to **cook the same amount, or more**, over the year ahead

**81%**

want to eat **more healthily** over the year ahead

# Britain's got cooking again

**It's no secret that most consumers have eaten more meals at home this year. For many, the question of 'what to have for dinner' has been one of the big talking points within households.**

Compared to before the pandemic, households across the UK are having 136 million more meals together at home each week\*. Mealtimes have become even more important moments in the day and most people (73%) have enjoyed cooking at home over the past 12 months\*\*.

At a time when so much of daily life has been restricted, what we cook and eat has become one way of introducing variety. This has seen the number of 'go-to' dishes that households cook each week expand from an average of 3.6 to 4.0 – the biggest increase in at least five years. This means that on average, one third of households have added a dish to their weekly evening meal routines\*\*\*.

As well as classic Italian favourites like spaghetti bolognese, pasta bakes and lasagne, we have seen lots of new entries become popular. Fast-growing dishes include curries, southern fried chicken, fish with potatoes and veggie pasta.

The trend towards vegan and vegetarian meals across the day also continued to grow: with plant-based (vegan) meals up 46% compared to the previous year, and vegetarian up 25%†.

Being at home more, has also accelerated the move away from ready meals, with people instead choosing to do a little more in the kitchen. Convenience cooking, which covers ready meals and pizza, is down 1.1% as a share of cooking, compared to before the pandemic††. This follows the decline seen in ready meal sales in 2019.

While this move away from ready meals has been seen across the board, when we look at what types of cooking households are doing instead, there is a bit of a divide.

Households without children have used the extra time at home to cook more from scratch. While households with children, who list taste and speed as the top considerations for what to cook and eat, are choosing to make meals using products that help cut out a few steps.

And looking beyond lockdowns and COVID restrictions, the interest in mealtimes looks set to continue. 91% of us want to cook as much, or even more, over the next year. Health is also likely to be a focus, with 81% wanting to eat more healthily over the year ahead\*\*.

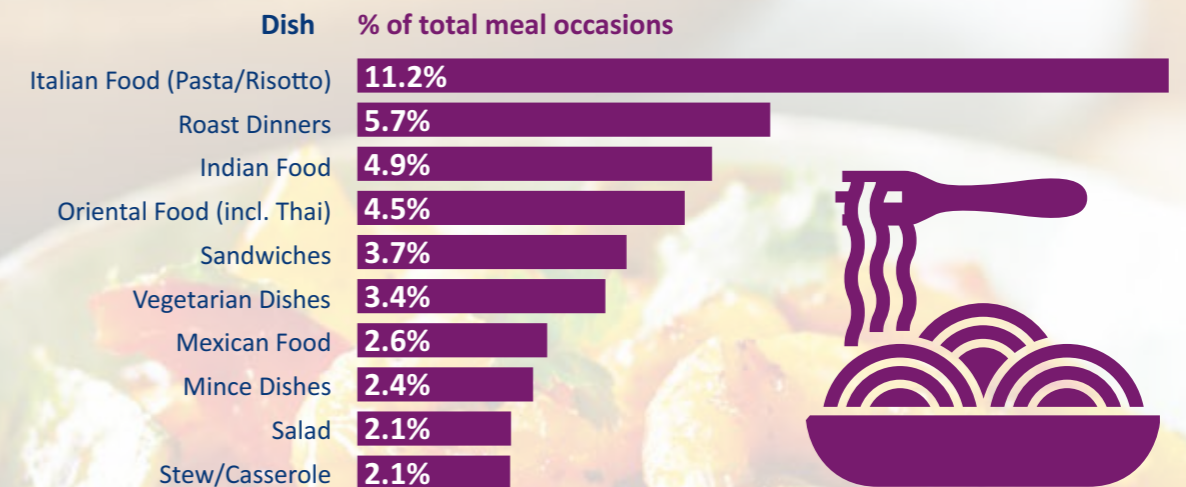
\* Kantar, Usage 12 w/e 29 Nov 2020  
 \*\* YouGov survey of 2,084 adults, Feb 2021  
 \*\*\* Kantar, Usage data, Individual weekly repertoires at the evening meal, 36 w/e 29 Nov 2020 vs 52 w/e 22 Mar 2020  
 † Kantar Usage panel, 36 w/e 29th Nov 2020 vs previous year, savoury foods at lunch/evening meal, in home & carried out  
 †† Kantar, Usage 36 w/e 29 Nov 2020



## Go-to- dishes cooked each week



## Most popular evening dishes during the pandemic



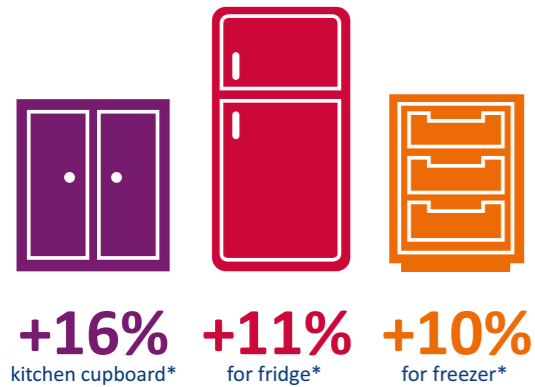
## Fastest growing evening dishes during the pandemic

- 1 Fish & Potatoes
- 2 Vegetarian Curry
- 3 Chicken & Mash
- 4 Chicken & Potatoes
- 5 Southern Fried Chicken
- 6 Pie & Chips
- 7 Vegetarian Pasta
- 8 Pie & Mash
- 9 Toast
- 10 BBQ



\* Kantar, Usage, evening meals, 36 w/e 29 Nov 20 vs the same period in prior year

# The kitchen cupboard comes up with the goods



The cupboard has long been the heart of our kitchens, home to many of the staples of British cooking. But over the course of the pandemic, we have seen households reach to the kitchen cupboard even more when preparing their meals – and more so than both the fridge and the freezer.

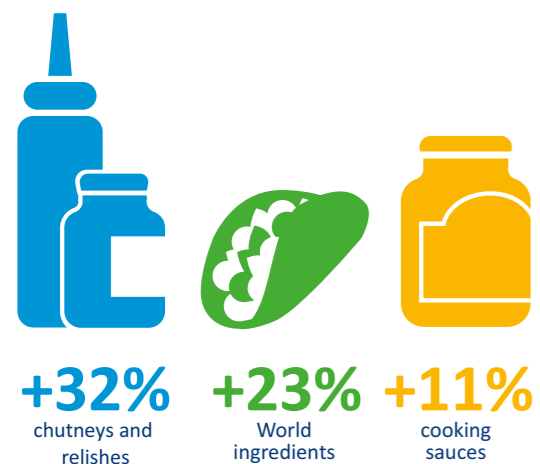
Baking ingredients, herbs and spices, flour and noodles are amongst the most popular ingredients, with the kitchen cupboard firmly establishing itself as the starting point for much of our cooking.

People have also used their freezer more than before, with many of us doing so to store batch cooked food (51%) and reduce food waste (53%)\*\*.



# In search of flavour and variety

The nation's favourite evening meals have continued to prove popular during the pandemic, with UK households cooking a total of 140 million more Italian dishes compared to the same period the year before\*\*\*.



However, with food becoming an even more important source of joy and excitement in our daily lives, we have also seen a drive to liven up our meals by trying or adding new flavours. Curry pastes and powder, Mexican meal kits and cooking sauces, as well as condiments such as chutneys and relishes, have all featured more frequently in our evening meals†.



Looking ahead, our research shows that exploration and the search for variety will continue to be a focus for many of us. More than a third of people (35%) say that the ability to try out new cuisines and recipes will be a key driver for them to cook at home over the year ahead.

Sharwood's Devil's Curry sauce is one example of this trend in action

\* Kantar, Usage, servings per person per week, products based on typical location, 52 w/e 29 Nov 2020  
 \*\* YouGov survey of 2,084 adults, Feb 2021  
 \*\*\* Kantar, Usage, 36 w/e 29 Nov 20  
 † Kantar Usage panel, 12 w/e 29 Nov 20 vs. 12 w/e 01 Dec 19

# The Kitchen Cooking Index

After a year in which we all spent more time in our homes, and in our kitchens than ever before, we wanted to take the temperature of the nation to understand how British households really feel about home cooking. Through a YouGov survey, we asked 2,000 consumers nationwide about their attitudes towards cooking in the home, their intentions for the future and their motivations.

We are all motivated by different factors when it comes to cooking: from being able to spend more time with family, to having the chance to relax and unwind. But our research shows that the health benefits and cost saving potential of cooking from home are two of the biggest drivers (55% and 58% respectively).

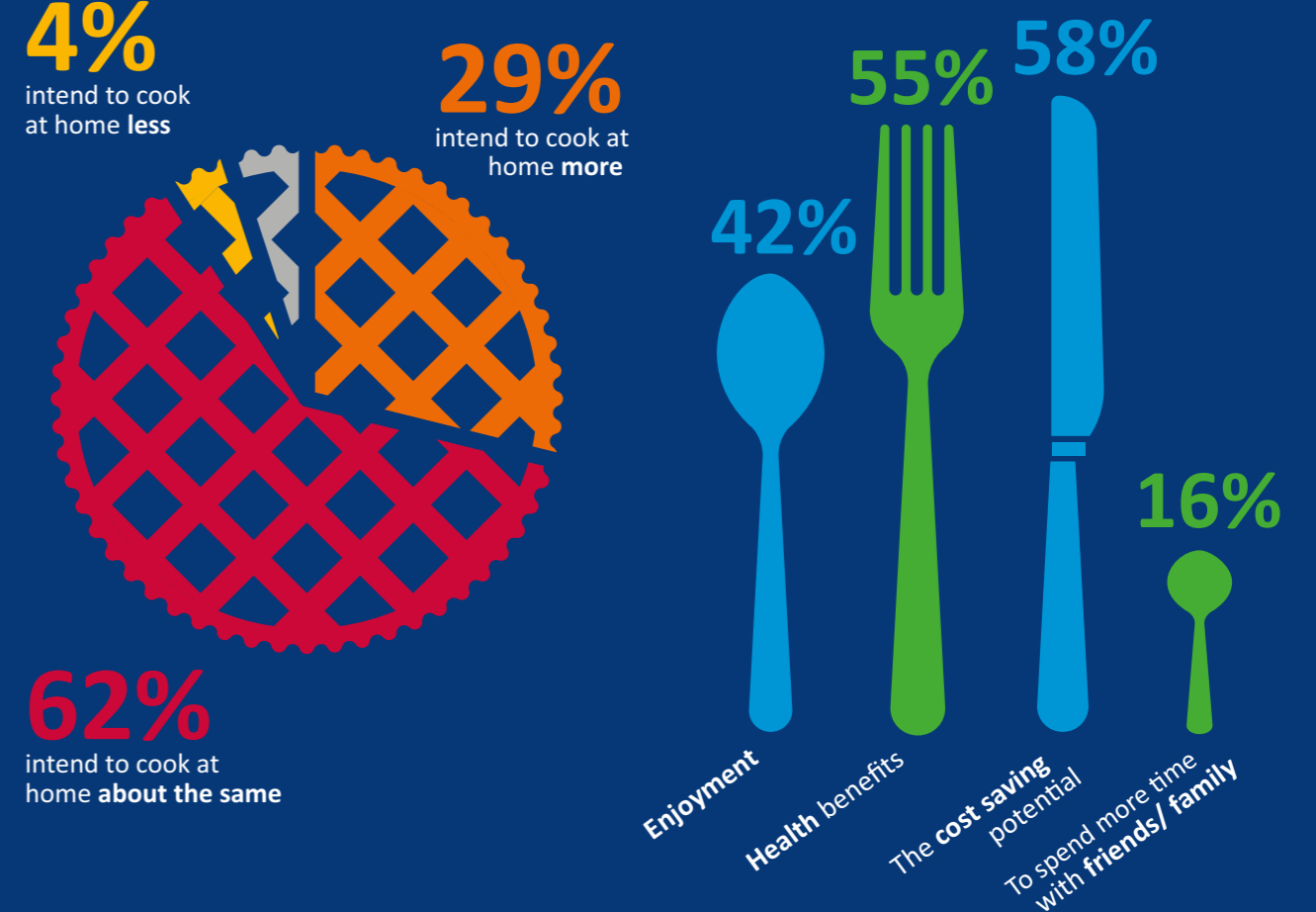
Our research shows that 73% of us have enjoyed our time spent in the kitchen, cooking meals for ourselves and our household. And an overwhelming majority of us want to keep this behaviour up: over the next 12 months, 91% intend to continue cooking at home as much as they have been, or more, over the past year.

So, regardless of when COVID restrictions lift in the UK, our Index suggests the nation is looking forward to continuing to whip up a storm in their kitchens over the year ahead!

## Over the next 12 months...



## What will drive us to cook at home over the year ahead?



**62%**  
intend to cook at home **about the same**

**73%** have **enjoyed cooking meals at home** over the past 12 months

# Brits craving something different – and hot – at lunch

**With many people working from home, lunch habits have changed. As with the evening meal, lunch has become something we have looked forward to and more than ever before, has helped to break up the day. Households are coming together to sit down, reversing the ‘al desko’ trend that has arisen over the last few decades. A household of four, for example, is now eating together at lunch 50% more often than before.**

What we are eating has changed too. More people are looking for something a little different, and in most cases, something hot! What is more, this even happened over the summer months.

Lunches featuring something hot have increased by 52% since before the pandemic and now stand at 62% of all lunches\*. This isn't something being driven by the microwave either. People have taken advantage of being at home to use their hob, grill and oven during the working day.

So, as well as sandwiches, which remain the most popular choice (35% of all lunches), people are making toasties or adding something hot to their dishes like fishfingers or baked beans. We are also looking for easy meals at lunch, with an increase in things like shop bought or pre-packaged soup, instant noodles or rice pots and cooking sauces.

Lunch has also grown in importance as a key moment in our day for getting in our veggies and we are increasingly opting for meat-free and plant-based meals. When looking at what has driven our lunch choices, people are increasingly looking for something with health benefits - much more than before the pandemic.\*\*

# 62%

of all lunches now include something hot

\* Kantar, Usage, Lunches prepared hot, 4/w/e 29 Nov 2020  
 \*\* Kantar, Usage, Midweek lunches in home, 4 w/e 4 Oct 20 vs. 52 w/e 22 Mar 20



# A day in the life of modern Britain

In addition to carrying out a nationwide poll with YouGov, we spoke to three of our ‘People and Stories’ panel, an initiative that follows the lives of 25 UK households, to gain deeper insight into their mealtime routines and habits in recent months.

## Tracey (34) and young daughter

*Even if I'm not eating, I'll still sit with my daughter while she has her breakfast to get ready for the day ahead.*

*At lunch, I've been experimenting with spices, using different ones and trying new things out. I've also turned to the stove much more than before.*

*The pandemic has made me realise the importance of eating together. At dinner time it's our time: no phones, and no TV. Even if we're sitting in silence, I feel like we're connecting more than before.*



## Ann and Nelson (64) empty nesters

*Lockdown breakfasts for us are always the same: cereal and fruit to set us up for a long morning walk.*

*I've definitely been missing my 'ladies lunches', but during the lockdown, we went through our cupboards and rediscovered a load of ingredients that we'd forgotten about.*

*For dinner on Mondays we have the leftover roast from Sunday. Other days we have stir-frys or casseroles using a sachet for the sauce. Thursdays we always have a light dinner like grilled fish and rice – we've actually lost quite a lot of weight this year by watching what we eat. Recently we have started to get a delivery from the local fish and chip shop every other Friday.*

## Jon (46), Kerry and three teenagers

*Breakfast time is very fluid. For the kids, it could be any time from 7.30am to 11am – depending on when their university lessons start. But for me, it's all about the coffee to fuel my commute to the front room!*

*For me, lunch is about not wasting leftovers from the night before, but also trying to add something fresh and healthy as well.*

*We always try to make sure that we're all there for dinner – even if it's just 20 minutes or half an hour. Those little touch points matter.*



## Replicating the out-of-home experience in-home

### Butternut squash, spinach and chickpea curry

Splash olive oil  
 1 red onion, roughly chopped  
 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
 1 butternut squash, halved, de-seeded, peeled and cubed  
 400g can chickpeas, drained and rinsed  
 1 x 420g Jar 30% less fat Sharwood's Tikka Masala sauce  
 250g bag baby spinach leaves, roughly chopped  
 Few coriander leaves for serving

1. Heat the oil in a large frying pan, add the onion and cook for 2 mins until beginning to soften then stir in garlic and cook for a further minute.
2. Add the butternut squash, stir occasionally and cook until just tender, about 10–15 mins, add a little more oil if needed.
3. Stir in the Sharwoods curry sauce then stir in the chickpeas and spinach and cook until spinach has wilted and the sauce is hot. Top up with a little hot water from the kettle if needed, stir and warm through.
4. Top with coriander leaves if using. Serve with brown rice.

Recipe by **Heather Whinney**, food, recipe writer and prop stylist

People have increasingly sought to replicate the experience of eating out within the home: whether that is through restaurant meal kits, takeaway treats or recreating a restaurant favourite at home.

Friday and Saturday “treat dinners” have gone up 25% compared to before the pandemic. The evening meal has also seen people spend a little more as they trade up, contrary to other mealtimes where we have generally seen less spend.

54% have tried their hand at a ‘fakeaway’, whether that is cooking a curry from scratch or using products such as stir-fry sauces to recreate a takeaway. What is more, nearly two fifths (18%) have made a ‘fakeaway’ on average at least once a month.

This trend looks set to continue. Even after COVID restrictions begin to lift, 2021 is expected to be the year of socialising at home (once restrictions permit), as some families and households look to manage costs.

**54%**  
 have tried their hand at ‘fakeaway’

## Older consumers driving increase in restaurant deliveries



With restaurants closed and eating out restricted for most of last year, we have seen monthly restaurant deliveries grow by almost 350% since pre-lockdown levels. In fact, it is something that has increased through the year as more restaurants adapted and logistics improved, providing consumers with more options.

Possibly contrary to expectations, the increase in delivery demand has actually been driven by older consumers (45+). This group, many of whom would have regularly visited restaurants pre-pandemic, have rechannelled this spend to delivery instead.

More broadly, like online grocery shopping, this trend is likely to stick: 75% of consumers expect to continue buying takeaway as much, or more, when restrictions are lifted, demonstrating how the channel has evolved\*.

And despite this huge growth over the last year, there is still potential to expand, with 57% of the population yet to use delivery services for takeaway food.

## What about health and health driven eating trends?

It's been clear for a long time that people increasingly want to make health-conscious choices. When we asked people about their priorities for next year, 81% of us say we want to eat more healthily.

At the start of the pandemic, as people found themselves at home in extraordinary circumstances, for a while, health became less of a focus. The big priority for many Brits was to spice up life in lockdown, with tasty, enjoyable meals which were quick to prepare.

As the year went on, our focus on health has resurfaced. In recent months in particular we have seen a growing focus on meals that offer a varied diet or other positive health benefits.

Crucially, one key health trend which has been seen throughout the year is the desire to choose ingredients with specific health and other benefits. One of the clearest examples is the rise of meat-free meals.

Plant based (vegan meals) are up 45% on the previous year, and vegetarian meals up 25%\*\* across all main meal occasions. It's a trend which is happening across most life stages.

Fast growing meat free choices include vegetarian curry and soups and this is a trend we expect to continue.



\* Kantar, LinkQ Survey of 1971 respondents, October 2020  
 \*\* Kantar Usage panel, savoury foods at lunch/evening meal, in home & carried out, 36 w/e 29 Nov 20 vs previous year





### **About the research:**

The facts and figures included in this report are derived from two main sources.

Kantar Usage panel for the 52-week period ending 29th November 2020. All figures are compared with the same period the previous year, unless otherwise stated.

We also conducted a YouGov survey in February 2021. Total sample size was 2,084 adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 4-5 February 2021. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+).

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