



Craving Companionship[®]
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
U.S. STUDY RESULTS

**Home
Instead[®]**
SENIOR CARE[®]
To us, it's personal.

Introduction

In the United States approximately 40% of the population age 75 and older – 6.7 million people – lives alone, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. These seniors face significant socialization challenges, particularly related to lack of shared mealtime experiences, often taken for granted by most Americans.

Home Instead, Inc. conducted a first-of-its-kind study to measure mealtime routines, challenges and preferences of seniors age 75 plus who live by themselves in their own homes or apartments.

This comprehensive study, which involved 600 interviews, provides evidence that increased opportunities for seniors to share meals with others will promote nutritional and emotional well-being. Key findings include:

- Two of five seniors who live alone have at least four warning signs of poor nutritional health.
- One in five seniors says he or she sometimes or most of the time feels lonely when eating alone.
- Seventy-six percent of these seniors eat alone most of the time.
- The biggest mealtime challenge for older people who live alone is lack of the shared family experience, including lack of companionship.
- Mealtimes last nearly twice as long when seniors who live alone share meals with others compared with when they eat alone.
- A majority of seniors who live alone say they eat more nutritiously and the food actually tastes better when eating with others.
- More than three-fourths of seniors say they wish their families shared more meals together.
- The most common obstacle preventing these seniors from sharing more meals with others is that their family and friends don't have enough time.

As a result of this study, Home Instead, Inc. has launched the Craving Companionship® program to encourage extended families to bring back the family meal for the benefit of their seniors, especially those who live alone. The program — at MealsandCompanionship.com — features a recipe contest and cookbook, and includes a variety of resources such as tips and practical advice from Home Instead and the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging to encourage companionship and easy healthy meals.

Study Methodology

Home Instead, Inc. completed 600 telephone interviews with seniors age 75 and older in the U.S. who live alone in their own homes or apartments. The sampling error is +/-4.0% at a 95% confidence level.

Mealtime Challenges

- Two of five seniors who live alone (44%) have at least four warning signs of poor nutritional health.* The most common of these warning signs and their incidence rates are:
 - I eat alone most of the time 76%
 - I take three or more different medications a day 71%
 - I eat few fruits, vegetables or milk products 46%
 - I have an illness/condition that made me change the food I eat 31%
 - I am not always physically able to shop, cook or feed myself 25%

**The warning signs of poor nutritional health were previously identified and published by the Nutrition Screening Initiative.*

- Seniors who have been hospitalized in the last year and those with monthly food budgets of less than \$100 report higher incidence rates than other seniors for several warning signs of poor nutritional health.
- Nearly one-quarter of seniors (23%) say they do not always have enough money to buy the food they need.
- More than one-half of the seniors (52%) eat pre-made or convenience foods either sometimes or most of the time rather than cook for themselves.
- One in five seniors (20%) says he or she sometimes or most of the time feels lonely when eating alone.
- According to these seniors, the biggest mealtime challenge for older people who live alone is lack of the shared family experience including companionship and conversation.
- The most common obstacles that prevent these seniors from sharing more meals with their family and friends are:
 - Family/friends don't have enough time 28%
 - Family/friends live too far away 20%
 - I don't drive 17%
 - I'm never asked 13%
- More than one-third of seniors who live alone (37%) receive outside help with mealtime activities. Among these seniors, the most common form of help is with grocery shopping or transportation to the grocery store (81% of those who receive assistance). This help is provided by children (47%), friends/neighbors (22%) and other family members (21%).
- Men are twice as likely as women to want more help with mealtime related activities, including assistance with shopping and meal preparation.
- Nearly one-third of men (31%) have been told by their doctors or other healthcare professionals that they need to eat better compared with 17% of women.

The following percentages refer to the number of seniors who believe these are challenges for older people who live alone.

62%	Lack of companionship during mealtimes
60%	Cooking for one
56%	Eating nutritious meals
56%	Grocery shopping for one
49%	Eating three meals a day
45%	High expense of cooking for one
43%	Relying too much on convenience food
41%	Loss of appetite
38%	Eating too much food
35%	Eating too little food

Mealtime Routines and Preferences

- Seniors who live alone eat an average of 2.7 meals per day. They share meals with family and friends an average of 3.3 times per week.
- On average, seniors who live alone have a monthly food budget of \$185.
- Three-fourths of these seniors (77%) say they do their own grocery shopping most of the time and 61% say they cook hot, well-balanced meals for themselves most of the time.
- Mealtimes last nearly twice as long when these seniors share meals with family and friends (43 minutes on average) than when they eat alone (22 minutes on average).
- While many seniors prefer their independence when grocery shopping and preparing meals, a majority (63%) prefers sharing their meals with family and friends rather than eating alone.
- Seniors attribute many positive benefits to sharing meals with their family and friends. These include:
 - I take longer to eat 75%
 - I feel happier than eating alone 73%
 - I eat more nutritious meals 59%
 - The food tastes better than eating alone 56%
- Men (65%) are more likely than women (56%) to feel like they eat more nutritiously when eating with others compared with eating alone.
- Seniors want good-tasting, nutritious food and stimulating conversation when they share home-cooked meals with family and friends. Having a set, decorated table is not as important; this is even less important for men than women.
- An overwhelming majority of seniors (85%) say that having someone to share their meals makes mealtimes more satisfying for them. Nearly one-half (48%) say their mealtimes are more satisfying if they have someone prepare their meals for them.
- Nearly all seniors (96%) believe that family mealtimes were important for conversation and sharing when their children were younger and lived at home. Eighty-eight percent of seniors miss this family time together and 78% wish their families shared more meals together now.

What's important to you when sharing a home-cooked meal with family or friends?

97% Good-tasting food

94% A hot meal

91% A nutritious meal

88% Stimulating conversation

67% The entire mealtime process

42% A set, decorated table

Would you prefer to eat alone or with family and friends?

63%
With family/
friends

37%
Alone

HomeInstead.com