

Sources of food consumption data

There are several methods that collect data on food consumption. Depending on the original purpose of the survey, data are collected at different levels (at the individual or household level) and with different methods (e.g. 24-hour-recall, food frequency questionnaire, food records). The resulting data represent more or less accurately the actual food consumption of a population or population groups.

- The most important source to consult would be national food consumption survey data or databases with national data (e.g. the EFSA Comprehensive European Food Consumption Database <http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/datexfoodcdb/datexfooddb.htm>), ideally describing the food intake of individuals. These data are usually of best quality and report food 'as consumed', i.e. in the state it is eaten. Examples are grilled steak, boiled potatoes, spinach pie, raw tomatoes, Special K, or carrot cake.
- Data from household budget surveys (e.g. DAFNE – <http://www.hhf-greece.gr/dafnesoftware/>) are often the only available data in developing countries but are of less good quality. Often, the foods are not described in detail and are reported 'as purchased', i.e. mainly the food in its raw form (even if it is usually consumed cooked). In addition, the foods normally cover only those eaten at home, leading to an underestimation of food intake.
- Survey data are often available from universities, nutrition institutes or from ministries of statistics, health or agriculture.
- Food supply data are derived from agricultural production data and represent foods available for human consumption. They are published by FAO (see FAOSTAT <http://faostat.fao.org/>). As food supply data are at the commodity level, they generally give the least adequate information regarding which foods are consumed.