

Quotations on Food and Eating

*Quotations from life stories related to food and eating
shared by adults in rural Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming*
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Wellness IN the Rockies (WIN the Rockies) is a community-based research, intervention and outreach project that seeks to improve people's health in Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. The philosophy of the project is that people have responsibility for their own health, but communities have responsibility for helping create environments that foster good health and provide healthy options.

The qualitative research phase of the project included the collection of narratives or life stories related to physical activity, food and eating, and body image from 103 adults in three rural communities. The interview team conducted 56 one-on-one interviews with 29 women and 27 men, and six focus groups with 28 women and 19 men. Interviewees ranged in age from 17 to nearly 90 years. The interviews and focus groups were recorded on cassette tapes, which were then transcribed. Over 55 hours of conversations were recorded, resulting in almost 2300 pages of transcripts. From the transcripts, the research team highlighted 1680 quotations that were then grouped and coded into 146 categories.

Our purpose in gathering the narratives was to elicit experiences that illustrate the challenges people have faced, the successes they have achieved, and the insights they have gained related to physical activity, food and eating, and body image. Our goal is for these stories to guide future educational efforts and help make these efforts more meaningful and relevant. We hope to help people make lasting changes to improve their health.

Enjoyment

“Whenever I had a job [where] I was physically active, . . . I can’t say that food tasted better, but it was more enjoyable to eat because you were hungry.” *Male in his 30's*

Comfort

“My wife, . . . to this day her way of dealing with stress or dealing with whatever is to not eat. When I deal with it, I eat.” *Male, 30's to 40's*

“There’s comfort to food. . . . Feeling the need for food—like now, sometimes when you get kinda blue, it seems like [eating] is just something to do.” *Female, mid 70's*

Dieting

“These fad . . . diets . . . that you see on TV, . . . you can lose weight with them, but you’ll gain it right back. . . . You can gain the weight you lost and more back.” *Male, early 20's*

“My mom was always dieting, and I’m probably about the same size, or maybe a little bigger than she was at her biggest. And since she was dieting, it makes me feel like I’m too big because she felt like she was too big.” *Female, mid 40's*



Under-eating

“When I was in high school . . . a lot of times I got really busy and I didn’t eat, or my friends weren’t hungry at lunch, so I just wouldn’t go eat. And I know a lot of times . . . I would end up not eating all day.” *Female, mid 20's*

“My wife will leave to visit with her mother, and I’ll go three days without eating. . . . And then it’s like, ‘Oh I got to eat,’ and that’s not healthy . . . by any means.” *Male, early 30's*

Overeating

“I used to eat just enormous amounts and . . . don’t know why I did. . . . I really abused [food]. . . . I have no concept of being full. . . . You’re supposed to become satisfied and . . . if I get going I can put away staggering amounts. . . . And, . . . why I don’t feel full, I don’t know. . . . It has to be a conscious effort to stop [eating] because nothing’s going to tell me to stop.” *Male, late 30's*

“[There are] times I don’t feel like I’m in control, that I just want to continue to eat, and I *know* I shouldn’t be doing it, but I’m *doing* it anyway. . . . And I *know* better. . . . But just *knowing* better and [still overeating] . . . that’s irritating to me.” *Female, 40ish*

Clean Plate

“[I remember] that big Norwegian hand that my dad had—hands twice the size of mine—and he’d reach over and say, ‘Did I tell you to clean your plate up?’ . . . I mean [that hand] was just like a sledge hammer. . . . And you know, to this day . . . if the wife puts that [food] on that plate, no matter what, I’ll clean that plate up.” *Male, 70ish*

“My mother—oh, God bless her, my mother! You didn’t waste food. Now I know you’ve heard about those hungry starving children. . . . Everybody knows about them. Like that one bite you take or don’t take is going to make a difference. . . . I just decided that I had to make a real effort not to [always clean my plate].” *Female, 50ish*

Impulsive Eating

“I can’t control chocolate. . . . I just go home and I have [a chocolate chip cookie]; go sit on the couch, go get another one. . . . I have a hard time controlling some things. Then I’ll go on binges and then I’ll be really good and then I just fall apart again. I don’t know how to change that.”

Female, early 20's

“I looked at the choices that we had [to eat for lunch]. None of them looked really good. I almost didn’t get anything and then I saw chicken nuggets and french fries, both fried foods, and I said to myself *I don’t want fried foods*, but I ordered them anyway. . . . It was kind of a compulsive thing. I just ate them. I can’t say I enjoyed them really.” *Male, early 30's*

Eating Disorders

“I finally learned that food does not control me. And that took me a long time to learn that because in the 70's, I *was* anorexic and then I went bulimic. . . . [I was] *very, very* [lucky]. . . . I *took back* the control from food. And it’s like an alcoholic. I was addicted to that *thought* of food.”

Female, late 40's

Food Pushers

“I had a grandma who, if you didn’t eat a certain amount of food, thought ‘Well, you must not . . . love me,’ . . . she just kept stuffing it and stuffing it and stuffing it. . . . It’s almost like [she] equated . . . how much you ate with how much you loved her.” *Male, 30ish*

“[When I was a kid,] my one aunt would say, ‘You look too skinny, I’m going to make you some food,’ — whether you were hungry or not.” *Male, early 40's*



Childhood Experiences

“[When I was growing up,] it felt like [food] was a battleground the whole time. And I don’t remember [my mom] being mean, or my dad. I remember thinking, ‘I shouldn’t be eating this,’ and ‘I shouldn’t be doing this,’ and I think . . . I made it worse.” *Female, early 40's*

“You can walk into a school lunchroom and smell the smell, and it will bring you right back to the lunchroom when you were hiding stuff in your darn milk carton.” *Female, 30's to 40's*

Relationship with food

“Food was not necessarily a real important thing to me. . . . If I’m busy doing something else, I never even think about food. Like [my husband] would come in and say, ‘Are we having some lunch?’ ‘Lunch? What are you talking about, *lunch?*’ ” *Female, mid to late 40's*

“[When] you get hungry, you just eat to get rid of the pain, the feeling of hunger. . . . I mean, you should try to eat good, wholesome, quality foods, but mostly you’re eating to get rid of that cotton-picking pain.” *Male, mid 50's*

Ethnic Influences

“[My son] brought to my attention . . . he [has] never lived any place for more than three years . . . and in the course of that moving, I realize how often I’d gleaned a recipe from some aspect of where we were. . . . We spent a year in China . . . [and the] favorite foods that we adapted from there . . . , that’s been an interesting aspect of my . . . life.” *Female, late 40's*

Self control/Hunger cues

“The workshop that I participated in really taught you the sensation of *hunger* and *fullness*. . . . Realizing that . . . cleaning your plate isn’t what it’s about. . . . And it’s also not about going down the diet aisle—that eating cardboard isn’t the answer either. Chocolate isn’t put on the earth to torture us. It’s to be taken in reasonable quantities.” *Female, 40ish*

“I eat too much of certain things. Like, I really like my meat so I’ll eat lots of it sometimes. . . . I’ll eat and then I won’t feel anything . . . until I’ve finished eating and then all of a sudden my stomach starts to hurt me because I’ve eaten a little bit too much. Hopefully . . . I’ll . . . eat to where I still feel slightly hungry, but I’m not full.” *Male, early 30’s*



Emotions/Feelings

“I know that I use food as a tranquilizer. I’m very aware of that. . . . And I know that when I get really stressed, I want to eat. And I think that’s probably the biggest reaction of all normal people who are heavy—that food is their tranquilizer.” *Female in her 60’s*

“I think a lot of the eating is when you’re lonely. You just want to do something, but you don’t know what and it’s so easy to pick up and nibble on something. You think it helps you, but first thing you know you want more. Whatever it is [you’re missing, food] isn’t satisfying it.”

Female, mid 70’s

Illness/Medical Disorder

“I stay right around [200 plus pounds], but I figured that ain’t too bad. I take medicine that keeps the weight on me.” *Male in his 40’s*

“I know it’s a lot harder [to eat] now because I have diabetes, and I can’t eat a lot of things that I would love to eat. . . . And it’s quite a change from [when I was younger and food was scarce]. I mean, just to have food to eat, and then all of a sudden you can’t eat this and you can’t eat that.”

Female, mid 70’s

Food Preferences

“The worse [the food] is for me, the better I like it. . . . If I shouldn’t have it health wise, it’s probably one of my favorites.” *Male, early 80’s*

“If I’m hungry . . . but I’m not hungry for peanut butter, I won’t just pull it out because I’m hungry. I’m so picky on what I’m hungry for; it’s funny.” *Female, mid 30’s*

Strategies

“I don’t want to deprive myself [of certain foods] ’cause I’ve learned throughout my life, my personality type would be if I didn’t eat sweets anymore, I could see me one whole day bingeing on them. So I have to keep everything in my diet.” *Female, mid 30’s*

“[Eat] moderately. I mean, you can enjoy a piece of pie without enjoying the whole pie.”

Male, almost 50

New Foods

“I think food is almost like a history book to other lands and other cultures, . . . whether it’s spices, or preparation, or utensils. . . . I think it’s a history lesson all at one table sometimes.” *Male in his 50’s*

Negative

“I have [two children] and it doesn’t matter what I cook, one of them, if not both of them—‘Oh, yuck. I don’t want this.’ To the point that it’s become such a battleground, I don’t want to cook. I don’t want to eat at home. The [older child] is good enough to make . . . macaroni and cheese, and . . . make it for his [sibling], and so fine, just go do it—just so I don’t have to listen to you guys whine and complain. I’m tired of cooking and having people complain.” *Female, early 40’s*

Eating to gain weight

“I have never been the kind of person who had to be seriously watching what I ate in terms of weight. . . . If anything, there are times when I think I probably need to put on a little bit more [weight].” *Female, late 40’s*

“I always struggled to get to the . . . weight that I wanted to be . . . especially once the [football] season hit. . . . I tried like crazy, . . . peanut butter and jelly sandwiches five, six times a day so . . . I just couldn’t figure out why [gaining weight] didn’t work for me.” *Male in his 20’s*

Gives energy

“Before [my current job], I did construction, and it seemed like if you weren’t eating proper, you just didn’t have energy to make it through the day.” *Male in his 40’s*

“I used to be able to go all day without eating if I didn’t have a chance to, but now . . . I feel like woozy if I don’t eat. . . . Your body is saying, *yes, you do need to have these meals.*” *Female, mid 30’s*

Reward

“When I grew up, it seems like from the time we were little, food was used as a reward. . . . If you cleaned your plate, you could have dessert. If you do this, you can have an ice cream. And it’s been *really hard* to overcome that with my own kids, *not to do that*, to avoid that issue.” *Female, mid 40’s*

“To me, [food] was kind of a reward. . . . And so that’s something that I still have to fight. It’s been something that’s been wrong with me for a long time, but that’s one really important thing to realize—if you eat to feel good or reward yourself for something, that’s probably not a good thing.”

Male in his 60’s

Health/Nutrition

“Basically, like most people, I tend to enjoy food that I shouldn’t. . . . I’ve been trying to force myself to eat things I never thought I’d eat—finding out they’re not so bad after all— even love them. . . . Now I’ll see something I used to shovel down [and I’ll think], ‘*you know that’s disgusting.*’ ” *Male, early 30’s*

“I thought that I needed to stay super, super skinny to [please] the person I was dating. . . . I wasn’t eating healthy. . . . And I think *now*. . . I . . . realize what healthy eating *is* and what you can do to stay healthy.” *Female, mid 20’s*



Ideals/Goals

“I should be doing more and taking care of the old body a little better. You only have one [body], and you better take pretty good care of it. . . . I should have started taking better care of my life and my body years ago instead of just these last few years.” *Male, mid 50’s*

Lack of time/Energy

“Before I started [my current] diet, I would eat . . . fast food, like McDonald’s french fries, their sandwiches. . . . I would eat a lot of frozen food because studying doesn’t leave much time for cooking healthy or for shopping for healthy food. The frozen foods were a lot more convenient. They’re fast. . . . It doesn’t take you an hour, it takes you three minutes.” *Female in her 20's*

“I work several jobs and my wife works and . . . quite often at the end of the day, we just don’t have the ambition to then put together a fully balanced nutritious meal. And so, let’s go out and eat and when you go out and eat, you just get what sounds good, not what’s nutritious. Actually, that happens fairly regularly.” *Male, early 40's*



Work/Occupation

“For the last twelve years I’ve worked a rotating shift We work seven days on days, seven days on swings and seven days on grave and that really messes with your life. It messes with your eating habits. It messes with about everything you can imagine.” *Male in his 40's*

“[For lunch today I] ate . . . while I worked at my desk, which unfortunately happens way too often at my job. . . . [It] was not very relaxing. . . . It was like, ‘Inhale while you’re at it.’ ” *Female, early 40's*

Cost

“[When my wife and I] first got children, [we] really struggled. . . . You think people on food stamps would be emaciated but it’s not that. . . . And I’d have to say, during those years, we were eating a lot of stuff we probably shouldn’t have, but we did it simply because we were so poor it seemed like a little luxury. It wouldn’t hurt anything. And then it became a habit.” *Male, early 30's*

“Income and resources affect people. I just see my paycheck and I feel the tightness now. . . . It’s expensive to eat properly, but it can also be expensive to eat junk food. Making the shift from [junk food to healthy eating] can be hard.” *Female, late 40's*

Cooking

“My mother was a lousy cook. And our family agreed by mutual consent that she was a lousy cook. So anything that she cooked, we were tentative about eating. My grandmother was an extremely good cook. And so anything she cooked, we really looked forward to.” *Female in her 60's*

“When some young gal gets out of school and gets married, and [she and her husband] look at the bills they got to pay, the next thing you know they’re both working. They don’t have time to cook the way my mother and grandmother did. . . . So, what do they do? They go buy the stuff on the shelf that’s fast to fix and somebody else has already done the work.” *Male, 40's to 50's*

“The first time somebody told me they liked my cooking, I wanted to cook more. . . . I do some serious cooking now. . . . And if there’s any one thing that influenced my thoughts about food, it’s that ‘*Wow! I can make good food.*’ You know, people like what I make.” *Male, mid 30's*

Portion Size/Who Portions

“My wife makes me go on that half rule, . . . have a portion and . . . eat half of it and then put the rest back. . . . [She’s] trying to get me to lose a little weight because . . . she wants me to stick around a little longer.” *Male, mid 50's*

“My parents . . . put potatoes on my plate and I ate it. They put oatmeal in my bowl, and I ate it. I had brothers and [my parents] didn’t see the difference that maybe girls needed less than the boys.”

Female, mid 60's

Doesn't care/Time waste

“Most of the time eating is a chore. I do not like to cook. I do not like to prepare [food]. Don’t like to wash dishes. . . . I’ve never gotten too turned on about it. . . . I’m bad at grocery shopping too. I don’t like to go grocery shopping. . . . I don’t like wasting time. It’s almost like eating and cooking and all that is a waste of time to me. . . . There should be something else that I could be doing or something. . . . It would be nice if [eating] was optional.” *Male in his 30's*

Garden

“When the gardens are out, oooh, I just love to make homemade vegetable soup with fresh vegetables out of the garden. That’s my Saturday activity.” *Male in his 50's*

Atmosphere/Setting

“So when my mother remarried, the dinner table was the battleground. If there was a problem, if there was whatever, it was addressed at the dinner table and it was horrible. I got when I was probably about thirteen, fourteen—I just wouldn’t eat.” *Female, mid to late 40's*

“I’ll give you a typical me and my wife and the kids at home. [My wife and I] will probably eat in the living room. . . . [The] kids eat in the dining room, and they have their little pow-wow and they like it.” *Male, early 30's*

Other environmental

“You can try educating people [about healthy eating], but . . . you’re competing against the entire advertising media. You’re competing against schools being sponsored by soft drink companies.”

Male, late 30's

Age

“I think when a person gets into maybe the high school and college years, we somewhat get away from paying much attention to how we eat. . . . But then later on, we start thinking it’s probably important again. Maybe when it’s a little bit too late. . . . My wife and I actually do spend quite a bit of time at the grocery stores in the produce area.” *Male in his 50's*

“Since I’ve gotten older and less active, . . . I’ve watched my weight go up. . . . And, I haven’t had that problem until just the last year or so. Before that, my weight . . . pretty well . . . just stayed where it was.” *Female in her 40's*



Smoking

“I’ve smoked for 35 years. My doctor forced me to quit 10 years ago due to my health problems. After I quit smoking, I gained a lot of weight. When I was smoking, I would grab a cigarette and get some coffee, but I could avoid snacks. Now it seems like I grab for food instead of a cigarette.”

Female in her 60's

Medical

“My cholesterol’s marginally high, so I probably should be more careful about [what I eat] than I am. It helps that I exercise because . . . my good cholesterol’s very high. So . . . the doctor . . . says ‘Well, you’re marginal, but your HDL’s are pretty high so I won’t spank you.’ ” *Male in his 50's*

Meals

“My husband eats three hearty meals a day, but that’s all he eats. I would eat the three hearty meals, plus I’d have many, many, many snacks in between and he does not snack. And so I know if we’d sit at the table, he may eat more than me *then*, but I continue the meal. Or, I’ve already *had* the meal *before* we sat down and then I eat another one. . . . He eats the three meals and that’s very satisfying to him. I graze continually.” *Female in her 30's*

“I look back at my mom and we had three meals a day, every day. You could set the clock by when we ate. . . . That was a positive thing. . . . Now, I miss breakfast or eat supper at nine at night. . . . Busy lifestyle. . . . I miss the regularity.” *Male in his 20's*

Snacking

“I snack all day and I love food. And anytime that I’m bored, it almost feels like I eat. . . . And if I am upset, then I clear out the cupboards. . . . I think that I like to eat, and sometimes that’s the way I answer some of my problems.” *Female, early 20's*

“I really tried to snack on more things like celery and carrots. . . . Although I like them, after a while, it gets pretty boring. . . . But you push through, just to see if it’ll work. And it definitely works.”
Male in his 50's

Beverages

“I remember growing up, it was a real treat to go to town and get a pop every now and then. And now, it’s just how many have you had before breakfast?” *Male, early 40's*

“I was drinking 12 and 24 packs, just about every day, of Pepsi. . . . [Even though] I’ve cut down so much, . . . I still like my Pepsi, and that’s part of the reason that I’m heavy. I got really depressed and started drinking Pepsi, *lots* of it. And I was *so* glad that I got help. I mean, I still drink Pepsi, in fact, I wished I’d had one earlier.” *Female, early 30's*

Fast Foods

“You’re running ‘til eight o’clock at night. What do you do? It’s really easy to drive through the fast food place. And sometimes, that’s not fast enough.” *Male, 30's to 40's*

“I hate McDonald’s. . . . And having two kids in [this town], and they think that’s the only place there is in town to eat. . . . But that’s their favorite place and I get sick of it.” *Female in her 30's*

“I’d have to say my weight problem probably started [in college] because they [practically give pizzas away to college students]—five bucks—you can get a medium pizza. We all came from little towns. We didn’t have [delivery pizza]. [In college], we had someone bringing pizza to [us].”

Male, early 30's



Restaurants

“I like going to the restaurants where you have courses that come I don’t like buffet places I can’t go to a place where there’s so much out there that you just don’t get to taste the food.”

Female, mid 30's

“Most restaurants I think actually serve too much. But I don’t ever get a doggie bag.” *Male, early 80's*

Speed

“[There are] few things in life that you get to enjoy, and eating is one of them. You might as well take your time and enjoy it. I enjoy eating. I don’t like to rush through things.” *Male, 70ish*

“At my house, we always hurry through [eating] and it’s just something you have to do and get through it and get it over with. . . . We take [eating] for granted.” *Female, 40ish*

Eating in public

“I don’t like eating in front of people, possibly because of my weight. . . . A lot of times, being big, someone is thinking, *look at the fat guy with his chicken nuggets*. . . . I think I just prefer to eat at home because I’m just more comfortable there.” *Male, early 30’s*

“I’m not a ‘*closet eater*’—quote, un-quote—but I sometimes don’t feel comfortable with eating certain things in public and I’ll take it home.” *Female, early 60’s*

Family/Parents

“Probably some of the most fond [childhood] memories . . . [I have are from] just sitting down and eating dinner *together*. . . . It’s not the food so much, but maybe the social time around the food. . . . Dinner time was a family time. And at my house now, it’s not.” *Male, 30’s to 40’s*

“My mom came from a big family and everybody got together for every holiday and cooked everything under the sun. And I always thought it was kind of a pain.” *Female, 40ish*



Parenting

“When I was at basic training, my folks were watching the kids for me. And all dad had wanted them to do was eat like a teaspoon of [peas]. That’s [my Dad’s] thing. You take one little tiny bit. And so it became a battle, and of course my dad won. And I happened to call right in the middle of it, and so [my son’s] bawling, and I haven’t seen him for three months, and I’m thinking, ‘*Is it such a big deal that he didn’t want the peas?*’” *Female, mid 30’s*

“My kids have a sweet tooth and I’m like, ‘*No. It’s bad for you. It’s bad for you.*’ And I’m probably doing to [my kids] what [my parents] did to me.” *Female, early 40’s*

Competition for food

“I was raised in a [big] family. . . . [It was] ‘take and inhale as fast as you can’ [because] you’re afraid you wouldn’t get enough. . . . Not that there wasn’t ever enough food—it’s just that perception . . . I need[ed] to stake this out as mine and I’d better put as much on my plate when the bowl comes around, otherwise if I want some more it might not be there.” *Female, early 40’s*

“I was one of those kids that sat at the table and ate [my food] and tried to get some [food] from my brother.” *Male in his 50’s*

Friends/Peers

“As far as food, I like to eat a lot of red meat. . . . I had a roommate once with a vegetarian girlfriend and that was just completely foreign to me. I found out that what I eat defines me. . . . I didn’t realize until then that people ate different things. It’s a pretty obvious thing, but something you just don’t think about. . . . We were excellent friends, but . . . there was not agreement as far as food.”

Male in his 20’s

Eating alone

“At lunchtime, . . . I’ll take my book and sit and read, and I’ve occasionally had people say, ‘Do you want to come sit with us?’ No, I really don’t. . . . And so [reading and eating] is my way of escaping from the world.” *Female, early 40’s*

“I used to hide when I ate. I’ve actually gotten to where I don’t do that anymore. I think I did that mostly because I was told [by my ex-husband], ‘Don’t do that because you’re so big.’ So I was like, ‘Fine, I’ll show you,’ and I ate it anyway. . . . And when I quit hiding it, I actually started losing the weight. It was a *weird* thing. I don’t know what it was. It was a weird thing. . . . It was like a board hitting me on the side of the head.” *Female in her 40’s*

Social

“Regardless of the home that we lived in, or the community we’ve lived in, it always seems that when we have people over, . . . in the kitchen . . . is where we end up. Which tells me that food and fellowship—socializing—go together.” *Female, late 40’s*

“I think the big thing that I enjoyed [about family gatherings] . . . more than . . . even the food, was the association with your family. . . . That was the time that you *really* enjoyed your family . . . sitting there around the table. And eating together, it seemed like that was quality time.” *Male, 60ish*

Rebellion

“My husband—he’s a diabetic. So, when he was diagnosed with that, I thought ‘oh, brother, here we go.’ And for a long time, [he’d say], ‘*you’re trying to starve me!*’ . . . Well, my goodness, . . . he’s a big man. . . . So I thought, ‘Okay, [I need a] different approach,’ so I had to look at a whole different way of cooking. Every once in a while, he’ll get a bread attack. Good ol’ peanut butter and jelly and he decides to eat the whole loaf of bread.” *Female, late 40’s*

“ [My wife is] trying to get me to lose a little weight, . . . and sometimes . . . [she’s] a little obnoxious. . . . At night watching TV . . . [I] wait for her to doze off and go to sleep so [I] can zing down to the kitchen. . . . Sometimes . . . I wish she’d quit harping about [my eating] because then I find myself getting a little rebellious and just doing things to go against what she’s telling me.”

Male, mid 50’s

“If my husband ever says anything about [my] weight . . . I say, ‘*that’s going to make me eat more.*’ . . . I think he’d probably prefer that I was a skinny, cute wife, and I would too, but it’s not worth the defeat.” *Female, mid 40’s*

