

<http://www.foodinsight.org/older-online-shoppers>



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**Contact:** Megan Meyer ([meyer@ific.org](mailto:meyer@ific.org))

**Phone:** (202) 296-6531

## **Survey Finds That Few Older Americans Grocery-Shop Online, But Lowering Hurdles Could Sway Many**

*Online Shoppers Eager for Food Information, But Often Come Up Empty*

(Washington, D.C.)—The number of Americans over 50 who are online grocery-shopping is relatively low, with only **17 percent** ever having ordered groceries to be picked up from a store, **17 percent** from a prepared meal delivery service, **16 percent** ever having ordered groceries to be delivered, and **10 percent** having ordered from a meal-kit delivery service. Those are among the findings from a new survey conducted by the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation in collaboration with AARP Foundation.

On the other hand, the vast majority of older consumers shop at more traditional venues in-person, with **90 percent** shopping at a supermarket at least once a month, **71 percent** at a super-store, and **46 percent** at a warehouse/discount club.

“While the overall number of Americans over 50 who grocery-shop online is relatively low, the findings can help us forecast future trends as technology use becomes even more common among older adults and other age groups,” said Alexandra Lewin-Zwerdling, Vice President of Research and Partnerships at the IFIC Foundation.

### **Who Are the Online Shoppers?**

Two groups of older consumers who buy groceries and food online tend to stand out—and they come from different ends of the spectrum: those in higher income brackets and those who report mobility issues (and also tend to have lower incomes).

A typical older, online grocery shopper is likely to be in their 50s, from the Northeast, college-educated, working full-time and white.

Online grocery shoppers with annual incomes below \$35,000 are far more likely (**30 percent**) to report mobility issues as a major obstacle than those earning more than \$75,000 (**7 percent**).

“We found that older Americans who buy groceries online are not at all a monolithic group, and that there are a variety of reasons and motivations behind their purchases,” said Lewin-Zwerdling. “Changing desires and circumstances in life change our online purchasing behavior, with diverse factors from affluence and education to physical limitations.”

### **How Often Are They Buying Online?**

Consumers 50 and older who order food online do so infrequently. Of those shopping online, most use computers to order groceries or meal delivery. The number who order less than once a month includes **41 percent** from a prepared meal delivery service, **40 percent** from meal-kit delivery services, **34 percent** for groceries to be picked up in person, and **55 percent** for groceries to be delivered.

### **What Are They Buying?**

Several categories of consumer packaged goods and other products comprise older Americans’ online purchases, generally descending—as might be expected—in order of shelf life or perishability.

Products that online shoppers are currently buying or feel comfortable buying include cleaning products (**89 percent**); household paper products (**88 percent**); canned foods (**86 percent**); packaged pantry items (**82 percent**); bottled water (**79 percent**); condiments and sauces (**78 percent**); personal hygiene products (**74 percent**); spices (**73 percent**); grains other than bread (**72 percent**); carbonated beverages (**72 percent**); teas or juices (**70 percent**); bread (**63 percent**); fruits and vegetables (**54 percent**); dairy products (**52 percent**); deli meat and cheese (**44 percent**); meats (**40 percent**); and pre-made dishes (**39 percent**).

### **What Companies Are They Buying From?**

When it comes to the companies where seniors shop online for food or groceries, a few stand above the rest in terms of their frequency of use.

The top grocery delivery companies are Amazon Fresh (**58 percent**), Peapod (**24 percent**), Google Express (**18 percent**) and Fresh Direct (17 percent). The top meal-kit delivery companies are Blue Apron (**63 percent**) and Hello Fresh (**42 percent**), with several others at 10 percent or less. Standing atop the prepared meal delivery companies is Schwann’s (**37 percent**), followed by orders from restaurants (**16 percent**) and from Freshly (**12 percent**).

### **Motivators and Barriers**

Online shoppers report both motivators for, and barriers to, their purchases.

Among those who already order groceries or food online, factors that motivate them include not having to travel to a store (**82 percent**), the ability to place their order when they have time (**78 percent**), access to a wide variety of products (**73 percent**), the ability to take time to shop for exactly what they need (**73 percent**), and not having the physical burden of getting around the store or carrying groceries (**72 percent**).

Conversely, barriers to online orders for the general 50+ population include high delivery or service fees, cited by **89 percent** of respondents; purchasing items in bad condition such as bruised produce, a desire to see/touch groceries in person, or difficulty returning a product if it’s not what they wanted or is

spoiled, at **88 percent** each; and receiving wrong or incomplete orders, at **84 percent**. Consumers over age 65 are more likely than others to report barriers.

The survey found a gender gap in some factors that would encourage people to shop for groceries to be delivered more frequently.

For instance, **70 percent** of women would be encouraged to make more online purchases if there were a guarantee that products were personally inspected versus **61 percent** of men; special coupons for online shoppers would encourage **67 percent** of women versus **58 percent** of men; **64 percent** of women would be encouraged by loyalty programs versus **52 percent** of men; and **63 percent** of women would be encouraged by the ability to view labels before purchasing a product versus **51 percent** of women.

When it comes to concerns about the safety of products purchased online, those who actually make such purchases have far fewer concerns than the general 50+ population: **56 percent** of the general population has no safety concerns versus **21 percent** who do have concerns, whereas **79 percent** of online shoppers have no such concerns versus **13 percent** of those who do.

### Looking at Labels

Consumers who do shop online are more attentive to food labels, with three-quarters (**74 percent**) seeking that information, compared to **59 percent** of the overall 50+ population. But that doesn't mean they're having success finding the information they want.

Among those who shop online and generally have more interest in reading labels, they overwhelmingly say it's harder to get package information online than in person.

For example:

- **51 percent** say it's difficult to get nutrition facts online vs. **18 percent** in person
- **50 percent** say it's difficult to get ingredients lists online vs. **15 percent** in person
- **48 percent** say it's difficult to get calorie and other nutrition information online vs. **15 percent** in person

Similar gaps exist for those looking for information online about nutrition benefits or health benefits.

"As grocery shopping and other food purchases move increasingly online, the chasm between older Americans' desire to know more about their food and their ability to find that information is troubling," Lewin-Zwerdling said.

"This suggests that we could improve the overall health of the older population by thinking more strategically and creatively about how to give them the information they want – and that would help make more healthy choices when selecting foods and beverages to consume."

For both online shoppers and the general population, the packaging information most sought after is the expiration date (**78 percent** for both online shoppers and the general population), followed by ingredients list (**70 percent** online, **58 percent** general population), Nutrition Facts panel (**61 percent** online, **52 percent** general population), and front-of-package information about calories and nutrition (**55 percent** online, **46 percent** general population).

## Methodology

The findings were derived from an online survey of 1,004 Americans ages 50 and older, conducted June 13 – June 21, 2018, by Greenwald & Associates and using Research Now's consumer panel. An oversample allowed for analysis of 370 consumers who have ordered groceries for delivery. General population results were weighted (by age, education, gender, race/ethnicity, region and income) to ensure that they are reflective of the older American population, as seen in the Census Bureau's 2017 Current Population Survey. Results on those who order groceries for delivery are not weighted.

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*The mission of International Food Information Council Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, is to effectively communicate science-based information on health, food safety and nutrition for the public good. The IFIC Foundation is supported primarily by the broad-based food, beverage and agricultural industries. Visit <http://www.foodinsight.org>.*

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