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College Students' Perceived Differences Between the Terms *Real Meal*, *Meal*, and *Snack*

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Abstract

Objective—To assess qualitatively and quantitatively college students' perceived differences between a real meal, meal, and snack.

Design—A descriptive study design was used to administer an 11-item online survey to college students.

Setting—Two university campuses in the western US.

Participants—Pilot testing was conducted with 20 students. The final survey was completed by 628 ethnically diverse students.

Main Outcome Measures—Students' perceptions of the terms *real meal*, *meal*, and *snack*.

Analysis—Three researchers coded the data independently, reconciled differences via conference calls, and agreed on a final coding scheme. Data were reevaluated based on the coding scheme. Means, frequencies, Pearson chi-square, and *t* test statistics were used.

Results—More than half of students perceived a difference between the terms *real meal* and *meal*. Most (97.6%) perceived a difference between the terms *meal* and *snack*. A marked difference in the way students defined these terms was evident, with a *real meal* deemed nutritious and healthy and meeting dietary recommendations, compared with meals, which were considered anything to eat.

Conclusions and Implications—These findings suggest that the term *real meal* may provide nutrition educators with a simple phrase to use in educational campaigns to promote healthful food intake among college students.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have not stated any conflicts of interest.

Keywords

college students; meal; snacks; nutrition survey; qualitative

INTRODUCTION

Young adulthood is a life stage marked by increased independence and decision making and a period in which long-term health behavior patterns are established.¹ During the transition from adolescence to adulthood, changes in dietary intake and other health-related behaviors may lead to decreased diet quality and increased weight, which makes young adults an important target for nutrition education interventions.^{2–7} Previous studies showed that the dietary habits of young adults need improvement, because many do not adhere to the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and fall short of the recommendations for essential nutrients, perhaps with detrimental effects on long-term health.^{4,5,8} Because habits developed during this time of life may persist into adulthood and have lasting consequences, health professionals must work to influence the practices of young adults positively.

In promoting health behavior change in young adults, it is important to determine the ways in which this group understands terms and concepts that may be presented in nutrition education interventions. Interventions that effectively target young adults using vocabulary appropriate to this audience were shown to influence behavior and led to more healthful choices.⁹ Previous research suggested that college students differentiate between the terms *real meal* and *meal*, with *real meal* described as being more nutritious, more psychologically satisfying, more filling, including more food groups, and being prepared with more thought and effort (L. B. Brown, unpublished data, 2010 and 2011). To the authors' knowledge, only 1 other study revealed a similar definition of *real meal*.¹⁰ The authors of that qualitative study in an urban Finnish city found that consumption of a single food, a small amount of food, or a meal missing specific foods was not considered by subjects to be a real meal.¹⁰ Prättälä et al¹⁰ noted that subjects considered real meals to be eating occasions that specifically included social interactions rather than eating meals in isolation. This concept of social interactions constituting real meals was been described by Sobal¹¹ and Sobal and Nelson.¹²

The authors' earlier work with college students (L. B. Brown, unpublished data, 2010 and 2011) provided a much broader definition of real meals than the work by Prättälä¹⁰ and Sobal¹¹ and Sobal and Nelson.¹² This previous work indicated that college students equated real meals with healthfulness, which might be useful in health promotion campaigns addressing college students' poor dietary habits (L. B. Brown, unpublished data, 2010 and 2011). However, this research was reported as preliminary findings and was limited to convenience samples of students enrolled in introductory and intermediate nutrition courses at 1 university, which limited the ability to determine whether these terms were commonly used and similarly defined by a wide range of college students. Thus, the current study's purpose was to determine perceived differences among *real meals*, *meals*, and *snacks* among an academically (not limited to nutrition-related majors) and ethnically diverse sample of college students at 2 western US universities. The authors anticipated that the findings from

the current study might provide nutrition educators with useful terminology to promote healthful eating patterns among college students.

METHODS

Participants and Recruitment

Participants in this study were undergraduate students at 2 universities in the western US. University A is The University of Hawai'i at Manoa, a public university with approximately 19,000 students, 36% of whom were Asian, 23% were Caucasian, 17% were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, 14% were multiracial, and a smaller number were other races.¹³ Females made up 57% of the student body.¹³ University B is Brigham Young University, a private university with approximately 33,000 students, 83% of whom were Caucasian/white, 6% were Hispanic, 5% were unknown/other, 4% were multi-ethnic, 3% were Asian/Pacific Islander, and <1% each were black and Native American.¹⁴ Females made up 47% of the student body.¹⁴ For the pilot study (phase 1) conducted between May and July, 2014, a convenience sample of 20 students (university A, n = 10; university B, n = 10) was recruited via an e-mail sent through department listservs to food science, dietetics, and nutrition students, who were asked to share the e-mail with roommates or friends in other departments. At university A, 7 students were from majors in the same college as nutrition, dietetics, and food science students, and 3 were from majors in other colleges. At university B, 3 students were food science, dietetics, or nutrition majors, and 7 were from outside these majors. The e-mail message stated that the research team was seeking feedback on survey items about how college students describe eating occasions. For phase 2, 628 undergraduate students (university A, n = 287; university B, n=341) completed the survey between October and December, 2014. Students were recruited by randomly selecting 15 courses with more than 30 students enrolled from each college across each campus, and e-mailing the instructors with the request to forward the recruitment e-mail to all students in their courses. The Institutional Review Boards at The University of Hawai'i at Manoa and Brigham Young University approved the study protocol before recruitment.

Procedures

The Figure summarizes the research procedures.

Survey creation—All authors participated in creating survey items using online survey software (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). The survey consisted of 11 items (4 open-ended and 7 close-ended questions) developed based on an existing survey (L. B. Brown, unpublished data, 2010 and 2011). It included questions about students' familiarity with the term *real meal*, perceived differences among the terms *real meal*, *meal*, and *snack*, and demographic characteristics.

Phase 1—Before progressing to the actual survey, students completed an online consent form. To obtain feedback on the survey questions, 14 students (university A, n = 7; university B, n = 7) were asked to take the survey and comment on question clarity. A separate set of 6 students (university A, n = 3; university B, n = 3) were asked to participate in cognitive interviews, which provided more in-depth question analysis. Cognitive

interviewing allows the researcher to determine whether people from the target population understand items as intended.¹⁵ In interviews, researchers trained in qualitative techniques asked students to respond to each question and then describe what each item meant to them and offer suggestions for modifying items for clarity.¹⁵ Specific questions posed included, Can you think of a better way to ask this question to make it clearer for another college student? and Are there any words in the question that other college students may find confusing? Field notes were taken during all interviews performed in the pilot study. Students who offered general feedback on the survey were sent a \$2 Amazon mp3 download gift card as compensation for their time; those who participated in cognitive interviews were sent a \$5 card. The survey was modified in response to participant suggestions before phase 2. Specifically, 3 questions and response options for 2 questions were modified for clarity. For example, the question, What is your current age in years? was changed to How old are you (in years)?

Phase 2—Students completed an informed consent form before proceeding to the online survey, which informed students of the researchers' interest in learning more about how college students describe eating occasions. Table 1 presents survey items. Participants were sent a \$2 Amazon mp3 download gift card as compensation for their time.

Data Analysis

For the qualitative analysis, data from the online surveys were exported into a Microsoft Excel (Redmond, WA) spreadsheet and then imported into NVivo (version 10, QSR International, Inc, Burlington, MA). All 3 researchers who carried out the analysis had extensive experience in qualitative research. Each researcher coded the data independently and evaluated 2 different sets of data from each institution: (1) responses from students who reported a difference between *real meal* and *meal* (authors classified these respondents as differentiators); and (2) responses from students who reported seeing no difference between these terms (authors classified these respondents as nondifferentiators). Any student's response could be assigned 1 or several codes, according to the content of the response. One researcher reviewed the codes and grouped codes based on similar terminology in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. For example, 1 researcher created a code of portion size, the second researcher created a code of portion, amount, number of foods, and the third researcher created a code of small size, larger eating occasion, more than snack. Codes that did not appear to be similar across researchers were left as independent codes. A series of conference calls was held with all 3 researchers in which grouped and independent codes were discussed and any discrepancies among researchers were reconciled. A final coding scheme was determined for all student responses and reflected the input of all authors.¹⁶ All 3 researchers reevaluated the data based on the coding scheme to ensure all data were coded accurately. If further discrepancies were noted, these were discussed and resolved.

For the quantitative analysis, means and frequencies were used to describe demographic characteristics and students' perceived differences among the terms *real meal*, *meal*, and *snack*. Pearson chi-square and *t* test statistics were used to compare differentiators vs nondifferentiators among demographic characteristics (gender, age, race/ethnicity, and year in college). Three students' data were excluded because survey responses for the questions

about familiarity with the meal terms were contradictory. $P < .05$ was considered significant. All quantitative analyses were performed in IBM SPSS Statistics (version 23, IBM Corp, Armonk, NY).

RESULTS

Over half of the college students were female, aged 18–55 years (Table 2). More than half perceived a difference between the terms *real meal* and *meal*. However, no significant differences were found between differentiators of a *real meal* and *meal* and nondifferentiators for gender, age, race/ethnicity, or year in college.

Common themes emerged from the qualitative data to distinguish students' perceptions among the terms *real meal*, *meal*, and *snack*, as described in more detail subsequently. Table 3 presents representative quotations, by theme, for those identifying a difference among the 3 meal terms.

Differentiators: Real Meal

The most frequent descriptor for a real meal was nutritious/healthy. Students highlighted the nutrients contained in a real meal, with macronutrients such as carbohydrate and protein often mentioned. The second most common descriptor of real meals was in terms of meal composition, with meal components (ie, entree) and specific foods mentioned. Many students perceived a real meal to have multiple components, with main dishes and side dishes. Examples of real meals often involved a combination of a protein-containing food such as meat, carbohydrate-containing food such as rice, and a vegetable dish. A third common descriptor of a real meal was one that reflected the Dietary Guidelines for Americans (DGA),¹⁷ with some comments referencing the Food Pyramid. Balance and variety were frequently cited as characteristics of a real meal, with examples of a well-balanced meal containing items from several food groups provided. Although not mentioned as often, a real meal was perceived to be home-cooked and formal, with mention of sitting down to consume the meal and going out to restaurants.

Differentiators: Meal

Students who perceived a difference between the terms *real meal* and *meal* commonly described the term *meal* as anything to eat. The next two common descriptors included meal composition and food for survival. Students provided specific food examples of a meal, such as a bowl of cereal, sandwiches/wraps, Ramen noodles, pizza/pizza rolls, smoothies, hot dogs, canned foods, chips, fast food, candy, and soda.

Nondifferentiators: Meal

The most common meal descriptors by this group included size (eg, large, big, lots), eating occasions, and the DGA. For eating occasions, breakfast, lunch, and dinner were specifically named. This category also included reference to eating 3 times a day, scheduling and planning the eating occasions, and eating regularly. References to the DGA included naming specific groups (eg, vegetables, fruits), dietary principles (eg, variety, balance), or a food

grouping system (eg, Food Pyramid). Some students described meals as nutritious/healthy and filling.

Differentiators and Nondifferentiators: Snack

Descriptions of snacks were similar regardless of whether students perceived a difference between the terms *meal* and *real meal*. Snacks were most commonly described as a small portion of food eaten to hold off hunger. They were also commonly described as foods eaten between meals. Students often provided examples of specific foods, food groups, or course/entrees that constitute a snack. Among these examples were items such as a piece of fruit, chips, cookies, and nuts.

DISCUSSION

Study results revealed that the majority of college students surveyed perceived differences in the terms *real meal*, *meal*, and *snack*. Qualitative findings demonstrated a marked difference in the way students defined these terms, which holds important implications for nutrition education initiatives. Whereas a number of factors at the societal, community, interpersonal, and individual levels affect eating habits,¹⁸ nutrition education may be used in conjunction with other strategies as a tool to affect behavior positively.

Definitions of real meals and meals confirmed results found in preliminary studies (L. B. Brown, unpublished data, 2010 and 2011) in which college students in nutrition courses similarly described real meals as *nutritious*, *balanced*, and *including variety*, and meals as *anything* and *lacking nutrition*. Findings in the current study suggested that *real meals* is a commonly used term among young adults in the western region. Of note, although the researchers did not select study participants randomly to yield a representative sample of students from the universities, most students were white or Asian, which reflected the dominant racial groups at the 2 institutions. No differences in demographic variables were revealed between differentiators and nondifferentiators, which indicated that the term *real meal* may be used among a diverse group of students.

In addition, in the current study, students who saw a difference between real meals and meals provided descriptions of the 2. Meal food examples were commonly processed and single-food items, whereas real meals were more complex in composition, containing more food groups and considered nutritious/healthy. Because college students' diets are less than adequate in meeting the DGA,⁸ incorporating students' perceptions of real meals, meals, and snacks might increase the relevance of nutrition education messages geared toward this population. If this message may be effectively conveyed through promotion of real meals, the implications for nutrition educators are significant. When using the *MyPlate* icon, for example, real meal descriptors could be linked to the icon to reinforce the message that incorporating all of the food groups helps one to consume a healthful diet. The *MyPlate* icon contains multiple dietary components that imply meal planning, and it reflects students' definition of a real meal.

Whereas both differentiators and nondifferentiators of a real meal and meal mentioned the DGA, the Food Guide Pyramid was the graphic students named; the current *MyPlate* food

icon was not mentioned. Although the *My-Plate* icon is designed to remind consumers how to eat nutritiously, the current study suggested that some students may not be familiar with the new guidance system. In designing nutrition education interventions for college students, incorporating the current icon and accompanying materials may be valuable.¹⁹

When describing snacks, similar ideas were expressed by both differentiators and nondifferentiators. The ideas emerged of size, timing, and having something quick to eat because of limited time. Because several other studies demonstrated lack of time as a major obstacle to healthful eating in college students,^{20–22} this factor warrants attention in designing nutrition education interventions. A previous study examining 18- to 24-year-olds' food views, for example, revealed that students viewed foods more in terms of convenience than importance of nutrition.²³ Similarly, college students in the current study frequently considered snacks as foods that could be prepared quickly to meet hunger demands temporarily. At times, these quick foods might not be conducive to healthful eating, as evidenced by some of the foods participants listed. The availability of low-nutrient, energy-dense foods was identified contributing to weight gain in college students.^{6,24,25} In tailoring educational materials to address student needs, educating students about healthful options that may be prepared and consumed in a short period to fit the student lifestyle is warranted.

Although the qualitative data generated from this study revealed perceived differences between a real meal, meal, and snack, it is important to consider potential differences in results using other methods of data collection. One alternative method of examining perceived differences in terms is a survey with close-ended questions, such as: Which of these terms describe a meal [or real meal, or snack]? Mark all that apply. Response options related to nutritional content, portion size, and other characteristics could be presented in such a survey. This method might generate stronger consensus on definitions of meals, real meals, and snacks. However, use of this type of quantitative method may have limited the number of characteristics identified compared with the qualitative method employed. Because qualitative methods allow for collection of in-depth and comprehensive data to examine a phenomenon,²⁶ the approach selected was ideal to fulfill the purpose of the current study. Moreover, it is usually necessary to start with a broad, open-ended approach to create a close-ended questionnaire.²⁶ It is also unknown whether students in the current study who were identified as differentiators of the terms *real meals* and *meals* actually had more healthful diets, because no measure of dietary intake was included.

Other limitations relate to the sampling strategy. The study relied on a convenience sample, which may not be representative of the college campus based on the nature of this strategy. A wider survey across the US is needed to know whether the findings apply to more general, diverse populations of college students. A final limitation is that the sampling strategy in this study prevented accurate determination of response rate, because it was not possible to determine which professors chose to forward the recruitment e-mail.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

The findings from this study may provide nutrition educators with another way to frame healthful eating in educational campaigns and in individual clinical counseling settings to

promote healthful food intake easily among college students. There are a number of possibilities for conveying nutrition education messages to college students using the terms examined in the current study. Media-based intrapersonal approaches were shown to be effective in improving students' dietary intake with media such as text messages and e-mails.⁹ Because such interventions involve delivering messages using limited text, the term *real meals* may be incorporated as a way to promote healthful eating in a concise manner. Other nutrition education programs involve environmental approaches, with point-of-purchase messages used in the dining hall.^{27,28} Similarly, the idea of *real meals* may be presented as part of materials in such a setting as a simple way to promote eating in line with dietary guidelines.

It also may be important to consider the idea of real meals when carrying out needs assessments with the college population. Further studies evaluating dietary intake patterns among students classified as differentiators are needed to determine whether perceiving a difference between a real meal and a meal translates into healthful food choices. Future research is needed to determine whether the use of the term *real meals* in nutrition education campaigns with college students leads to dietary behavior change. The survey developed in this study could be used by researchers to evaluate perceived differences between real meals, meals, and snacks among targeted college audiences such as those in nutrition/dietetics or health-related majors, and among others audiences outside a college setting, such as those of differing life stages and socioeconomic status.

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Figure.
Flowchart outlining the research procedures.

Table 1

Items on 11-Item Survey Evaluating Perceptions of Terms Real Meals, Meals, and Snack in Undergraduate College Students at 2 Universities in Western Region of US

Survey Item	Question	Response Options
1	Have you heard people (or do you) use the term real meal to describe an eating occasion? Mark all that apply.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, I have heard others use the term real meal. • Yes, I use the term real meal. • No, I have not heard or used the term real meal.
2	Do you see any difference between a real meal and a meal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes • No^a
3	What is the difference between a meal and a real meal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A meal: (open response) • A real meal: (open response)
4	Do you see any difference between a snack and a meal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes^b • No^c
5	What is the difference between a snack and a meal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A snack: (open response) • A meal: (open response)
6	Thinking about how you defined meal in an earlier question, how does a snack differ from a meal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A snack: (open response)
7	Are you a male or a female?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male • Female (Open response)
8	How old are you (in years)?	
9	What is your race/ethnicity? Please mark all that apply. ^d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black or African American • Chinese • Filipino • Hawaiian • Japanese (includes Okinawan) • Korean • Mexican or other Hispanic • White or Caucasian • Other. Please specify: (open response)
10	What is your year in college?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freshman • Sophomore • Junior • Senior • Other, please specify: (open response) (Select from list of majors specific to each university)
11	What is your major? ^e	

^a Respondents answering no automatically skipped to survey item 4;

^b Respondents answering yes were automatically directed to survey item 5 if they answered no on item 2, or to item 6 if they answered yes on item 2;

^c Respondents answering no automatically skipped to survey item 7;

^d University A's response options are listed in the table. Because university B had differing demographic distribution on its campus, response options were altered to be American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, black or African American, Hispanic, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, white or Caucasian, and other, please specify: (open response);

^e Number of campus majors was 84 and 129 at universities A and B, respectively.

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Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Undergraduate College Students at 2 Universities in Western Region of US and Perceived Differences Between Real Meal and Meal (n = 625)^a

Characteristic	Total (n [%])	Real Meal Vs Meal Differentiators (n [%])	Nondifferentiators (n [%])	<i>p</i> ^b
Gender ^c				
Male	288 (46.1)	144 (43.9)	42 (42.4)	.80
Female	336 (53.8)	184 (56.1)	57 (57.6)	
Age, y (mean ± SD) (range)	21.9 ± 4.4 (18.0–55.0)	22.0 ± 4.3	22.2 ± 5.5	.66
Race/ethnicity				
Asian (including Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, and Korean)	94 (15.0)	43 (13.1)	12 (12.1)	.90
Black	3 (0.5)	2 (0.6)	0	
Hispanic	12 (1.9)	5 (1.5)	1 (1.0)	
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	8 (1.3)	4 (1.2)	1 (1.0)	
White	366 (58.6)	197 (60.1)	65 (65.7)	
Multiethnic ^d	130 (20.8)	73 (22.3)	18 (18.2)	
Other ^e	12 (1.9)	4 (1.2)	2 (2.0)	
Year in college				
Freshman	70 (11.2)	29 (8.8)	13 (13.1)	.09
Sophomore	174 (27.8)	91 (27.7)	30 (24.8)	
Junior	187 (29.9)	108 (32.9)	19 (19.2)	
Senior	187 (29.9)	95 (29.0)	36 (36.4)	
Other ^f	7 (1.1)	5 (1.5)	1 (1.0)	
Campus majors represented ^g				
University A	46 (54.8)	–	–	–
University B	64 (49.6)			
Perceptions of real meal, meal, and snack terminology				
Perceived difference between real meal and meal	328 (52.5)	–	–	–
Perceived difference between meal and snack	610 (97.6)			
Heard others use the term real meal	340 (54.4)			
Used term real meal themselves	270 (43.2)			

^aData from 3 students were excluded in the analyses presented in the table because of contradictory responses to questions about familiarity with the meal terms;

^bPearson chi-square statistics were used for comparisons of gender, race/ethnicity, and year in college between differentiators and nondifferentiators; *t* test was used for age (years) comparison;

^cMissing data, n = 1;

^dStudent reported identifying with 2 racial/ethnic groups on the survey;

^eStudents' free text responses: American, Cambodian, Chuukese, Middle Eastern, North American, Pakistani, Tibetan, Tan, Vietnamese (n = 2), rather not say, and we live in a color-blind society. Studies show that race cannot be established empirically. I am a human being;

^fStudents' free text responses: fifth year, sixth-year undergraduate student, I have 4 semesters left, but I have like 90+ credits, in my fifth year of college, but fourth at [this university], transfer, transfer with AA degree;

^gUndeclared major (university A, n = 8; university B, n = 15) and other (university A, n = 12; university B, n = 4) were also reported.

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Table 3

Representative Quotations From Undergraduate College Students at 2 Universities in Western Region of US With Perceived Differences Between a Real Meal, Meal, and Snack (n = 328)

Key Descriptors	Representative Quotations
Real meal, according to differentiators	
Nutritious/healthy	Consumption of essential nutrients needed for the body to function and process normally. (UA-ID#120) A balanced meal. Not only quantity and timeliness but also a mix of several different dishes including vegetables, grains, and protein. (UB-ID#158)
Meal composition	Nutritious and healthy version of a meal or even just a full meal with courses (appetizer, salad, entree, etc). (UA-ID#189) Eating more than 1 self-prepared item at a sitting. Takes longer to prepare and clean up.; example: grilled chicken and rice with a salad on the side. (UB-ID#171)
Dietary Guidelines for Americans	A real meal is good quality food that is appropriate for a well-balanced meal. (UA-ID#209) Variety of foods including vegetables and fruits and will also fill you up. (UB-ID#23)
Home-cooked	Is a home-cooked meal using fresh products and very little or no preserved foods. (UA-ID#35) A homemade meal made specifically for that occasion, that is generally healthy, hearty, and overall pleasing. (UA-ID#166)
Formal	A real meal, like something homemade or something your mom would make for you for dinner. (UB-ID#73) Thought-out meal with multiple food groups that involves sitting down. This is for enjoyment as well as satiety. Sitting down with a salad, baked potato, and fish, probably with other people. (UA-ID#211) A real meal is a full-course, sit-down experience. This is typically done at home with family, or eating out at a sit-down restaurant that offers food that is higher quality than your average fast food joint. (UB-ID#50)
Meal, according to differentiators	
Anything	Food you eat because you don't really have time to eat anything else or anything better. (UA-ID#20) Something you eat quickly to get through your day. (UA-ID#110) Sustenance. Just eating something because you're hungry. (UB-ID#83) Food you eat at a designated meal time but usually consists of whatever you can find. (UB-ID#87)
Meal composition	A meal could be anything that you eat for breakfast lunch or dinner, like, for instance "I had 2 Hot Pockets for breakfast." That would count as eating a meal or a snack. Like, in college terms, a big snack can be considered a meal. (UA-ID#60) An easy, convenient means of feeling full, such as fast food, wraps, and sandwiches. (UA-ID#124) ... Something that you throw together quickly just to satisfy your hunger. It could be making a sandwich, buying fast food, or anything that is processed and thus easy to make. (UB-ID#4) A meal could be something like Top Ramen. Or another basic meaning would be a single food that is not combined with anything else. For example, I had a burger, but didn't have any vegetables or fruit with it. (UB-ID#11)
Survival	Food you eat because you need to sustain your energy. (UA-ID#46) Something to fill your stomach to get you through the day. (UA-ID#130) Anything to keep you from starving. (UB-ID#17) Typically the main quantity of food you consume that will hold you over until the next time you sit down to eat. (UB-ID#61)
Meal, according to nondifferentiators	
Large amount	Lots of food to satisfy hunger. (UA-ID#16) A substantial amount of food that provides the nutrients you need to be healthy. (UA-ID#30) A meal is a larger portion of food. (UB-ID#155)

Key Descriptors	Representative Quotations
Eating occasions	Food eaten at regular intervals throughout the day which comprise the majority of daily intake. Traditionally, there are 3 meals: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. (UA-ID#66) The 3 major eating periods of the day: breakfast, lunch, dinner. (UB-ID#12)
Dietary Guidelines for Americans	A meal is meant to be filling and consists of a variety of food groups that keep you energized and contribute to maintaining health. (UA-ID#92) Larger portion; contains several items from different food groups. (UA-ID#33) Something larger and sustaining, usually containing food from multiple areas of the Food Pyramid. (UB-ID#188)
Nutritious/healthy	It contains all the nutritious foods your body needs. (UA-ID#201) Satisfies the body with nutrients. (UB-ID#7) A meal is a substantial amount of food that will satisfy you and provide you with nutrients that are needed to sustain you until your next meal. (UB-ID#162)
Filling	Something to fill you, will give you a variety of nutrients, usually not on-the-go. (UA-ID#15) A meal would be larger, and fill you up rather than just satisfy your hunger. (UB-ID#88)
Snack for both differentiators and nondifferentiators	
Small	A snack is a small portion of food usually eaten between meals. (UA-ID#70) Only a small amount of food is consumed. (UB-ID#166)
Hold off hunger	Something small that you munch on to stave off hunger. (UA-ID#30) Something that you eat just to cut off hunger before you can eat a real meal. (UB-ID#31) A snack is something to keep the hunger at bay. (UB-ID#115)
Between meals	Something you eat in between meals. (UA-ID#232) To bridge the gap between 2 mealtimes. (UB-ID#155) Not at a traditional mealtime. (UB-ID#158)
Snack composition	It usually consists of fruits, vegetables, or dairy. (UA-ID#117) Something small such as a granola bar, a piece of fruit, some trail mix, etc. (UA-ID#204) Something smaller: apple, nuts, protein bar, dark chocolate, Jo Jo [potato wedges] (UB-ID#16)

UA indicates university A; UB, university B.