

**Background:** Food insecurity (FI) is one of social determinants of health and a profound public health concern because it leads to malnutrition and hence poor health. COVID-19 impacted people disproportionately and exacerbated preexisting social and health inequalities. The aim of this study was to understand how socio-economic and health conditions affected one's FI in Czechia during the pandemic using a representative panel of Czech adults from a longitudinal survey, Life During the Pandemic collected in October 2022 as part of a Czech longitudinal survey.

**Methods:** A study sample of 1,499 respondents was included in our multiple logistic regression models. Depressive symptoms and anxiety symptoms were assessed using validated questionnaires PHQ-2 and DAG-2.

**Results:** Approximately one third of the study sample (32.4%) reported being food insecure. In the fully-adjusted model, adults with depressive symptoms (OR 2.37, CI 1.49, 5.02), problems with sleeping (OR 2.20, CI 1.64, 2.96), smoking habit (OR 2.27, CI 1.68, 3.07), lower fruit and vegetable consumption (OR 1.50, CI 1.04, 2.17) had greater odds of experiencing FI. The lowest income group was associated with 6.2 times greater odds of reporting FI as compared to the high-income group (CI 3.96, 9.67). Lower education attainment also had higher odds of experiencing FI (OR 2.15, CI 1.40, 3.31). Anxiety was not a significant predictor for FI.

**Conclusions:** Our study highlights that food insecurity is associated with depressive symptoms, poor quality of sleep and lower consumption of fruit and vegetables among adults. Food insecurity was also evident among lower income and lower education attainment.

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**Key messages:**

- Our study suggests that adults with poor mental health and diet quality experience food insecurity.
- Given the established link between a balanced diet and mental well-being, interventions should encompass not only food security but also the quality of dietary intake.

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**Food insecurity is associated with poor mental health and health risk behaviors in Czechia**

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