



TRENDS, TENSIONS & TRADEOFFS: What's Shaping The Way America Eats

PRESENTED BY:

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International Food Information Council



OUR VISION

A global environment where science informs food decisions.

OUR MISSION

We serve the public good by effectively communicating science-based information about food safety, nutrition and sustainable food systems.

IFIC PROGRAM PLATFORMS

To demonstrate IFIC's thought leadership in action, we:

- **Deliver actionable research and consumer insights**, elevating the consumer voice and enhancing communication effectiveness.
- **Promote science communication**, positively impacting public health.
- **Convene critical thought leaders**, advancing the food systems dialogue and science-based decision-making.

2026

IFIC COMMUNICATIONS FORUM MEMBERS



Food & Health
COMMUNICATIONS
FORUM





ANNUAL IFIC FOOD & HEALTH SURVEY

Since 2006, IFIC has conducted its annual flagship survey of Americans about their food behaviors, beliefs, and perceptions.

2026 marks the 21st consecutive year of the *IFIC Food & Health Survey*, making it one of the most influential and widely referenced annual consumer surveys in the U.S. for academic researchers, healthcare professionals, industry stakeholders, media, and policymakers.



2026 IFIC *Food & Health Survey*

An annual survey of American consumers to understand perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors surrounding food and food-purchasing decisions. 2026 marks the 21st consecutive year that the International Food Information Council (IFIC) has commissioned the *IFIC Food & Health Survey*.



Access All 20 Years of the
IFIC FOOD & HEALTH SURVEY online





MONTHLY IFIC SPOTLIGHT SURVEYS

IFIC generates monthly consumer insights through *IFIC Spotlight Surveys*.

Each month, we engage 1,000 Americans to measure knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about timely and relevant topics in food and ingredient safety as well as nutrition and health.

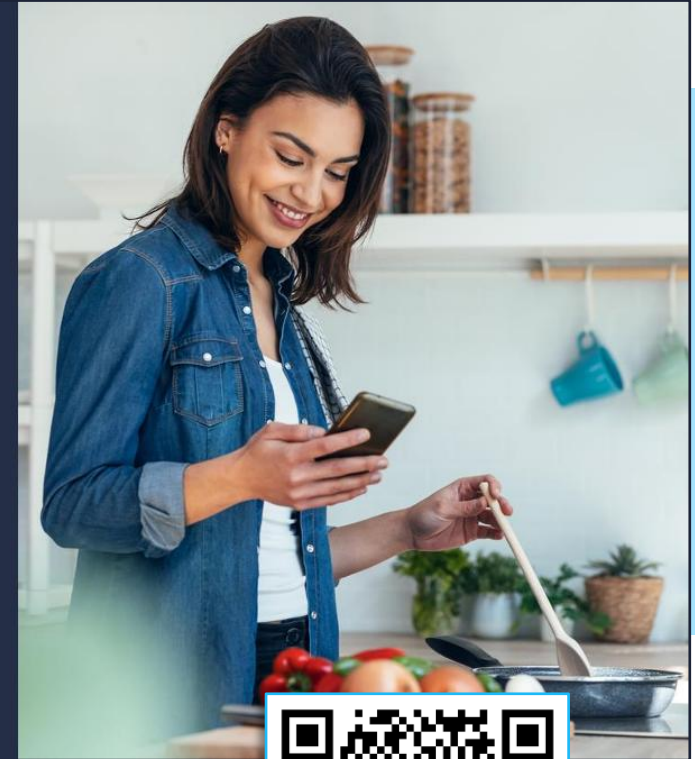
IFIC Spotlight Surveys align with the topics of our monthly IFIC Expert Webinars, educational resources and toolkits, as well as our social media messaging and content development.



Americans' Perceptions of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans

May 2026

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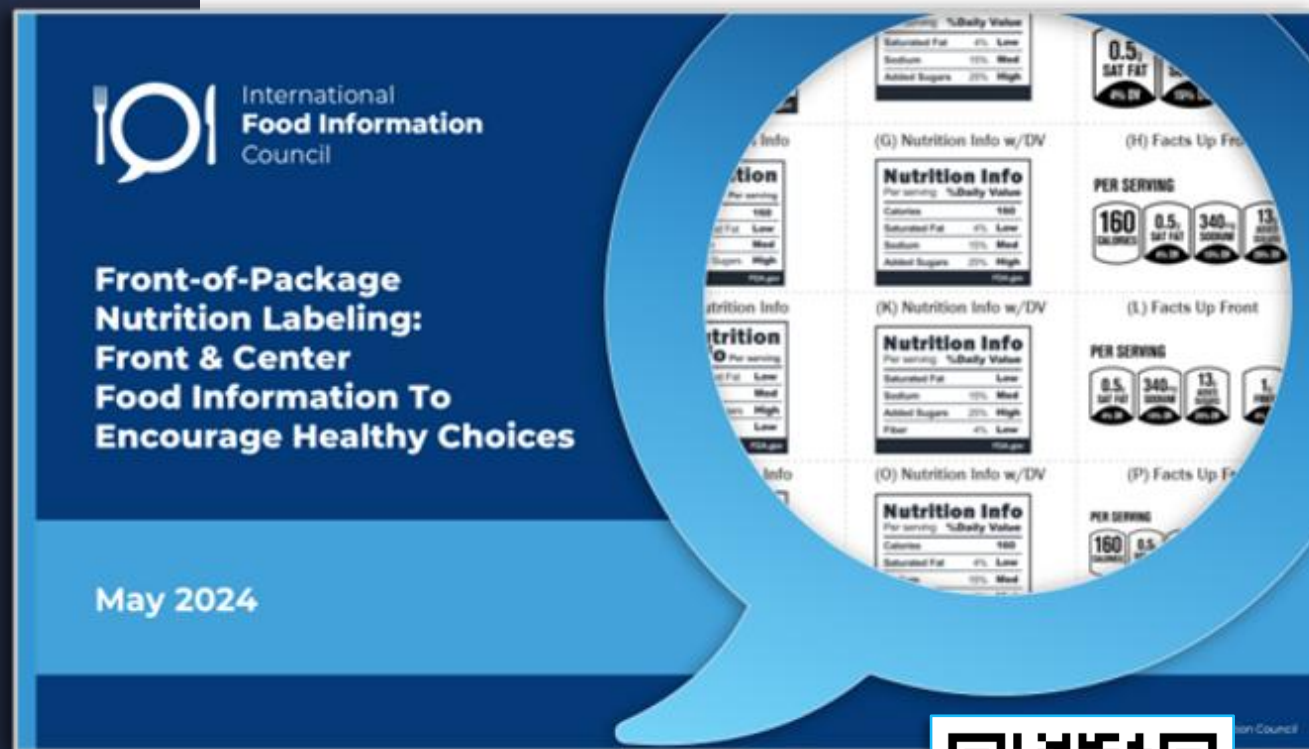


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SURVEYS** online

IFIC SPECIAL & COMMISSIONED CONSUMER RESEARCH

IFIC addresses the more complex and critical food topics through its Special & Commissioned Research Projects Program.

IFIC uses these consumer insights to inform the content and delivery of IFIC's education and communication programs. In doing so, IFIC shares the voice of the consumer to advance dialogue among key nutrition and food safety stakeholders in academia, government, public health, industry, nutrition education, and science communication.



Access **IFIC COMMISSIONED RESEARCH** online



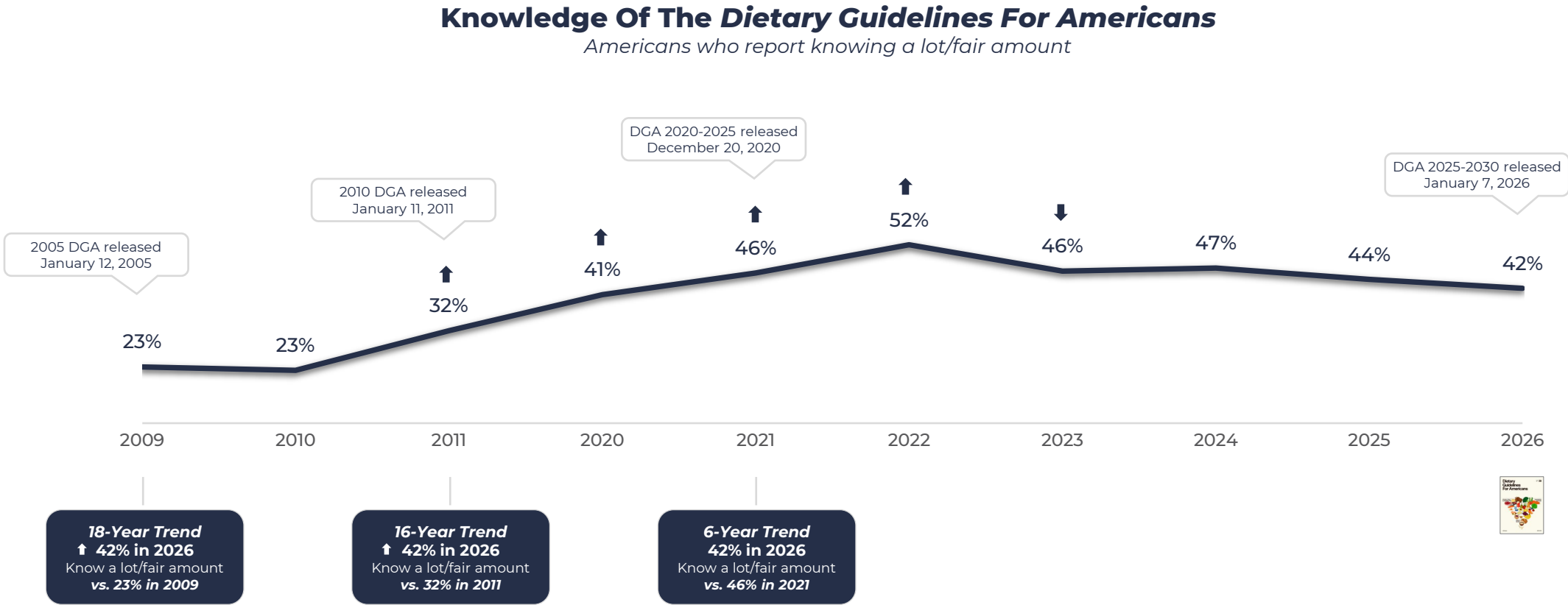
A Focus On **Dietary Guidance & Processed Food**

An annual survey of American consumers to understand perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors surrounding food and food-purchasing decisions. 2026 marks the 21st consecutive year that the International Food Information Council (IFIC) has commissioned the *IFIC Food & Health Survey*.



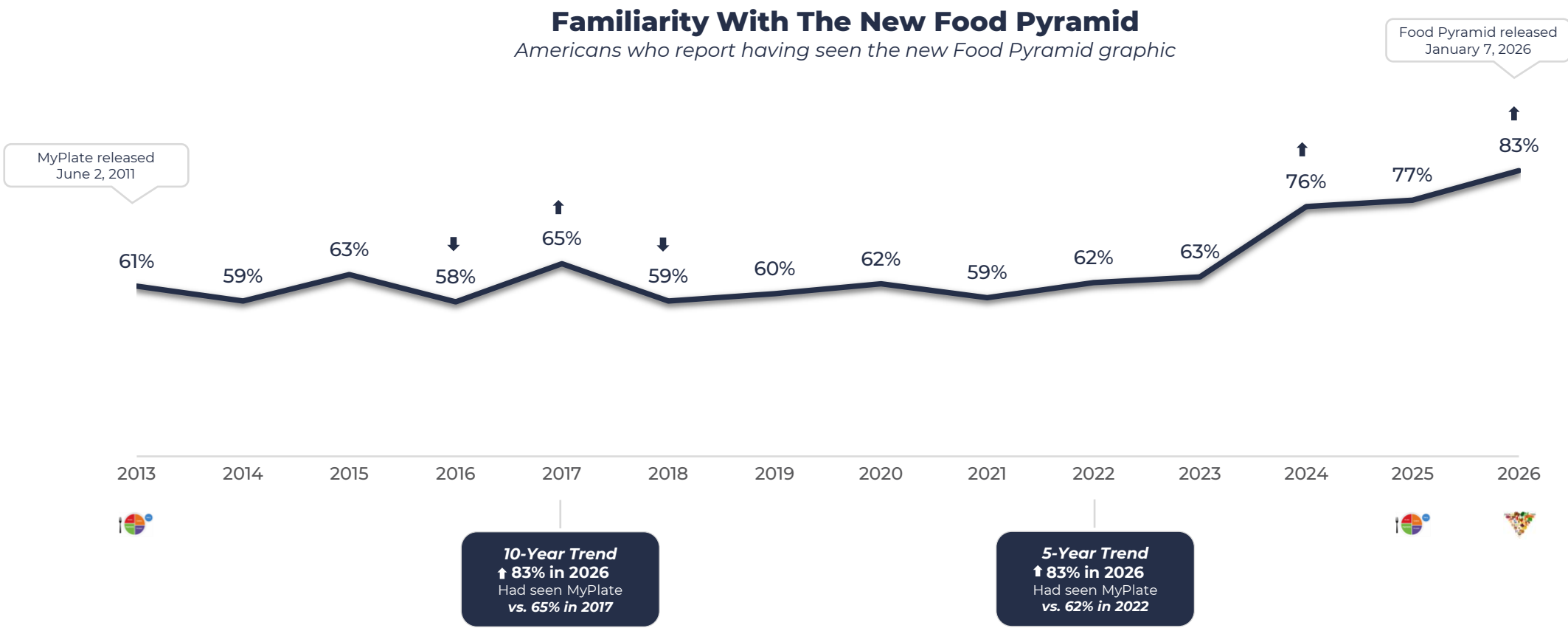
More than four in ten Americans say they know at least a fair amount about the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

At 42%, familiarity with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* remains above 2011 levels (32%) but below 2021 (46%). The 2011, 2021, and 2026 *IFIC Food & Health Surveys* were each fielded within four months of a new Dietary Guidelines release.



Within three months of its debut, more than eight in ten Americans report having seen the new Food Pyramid.

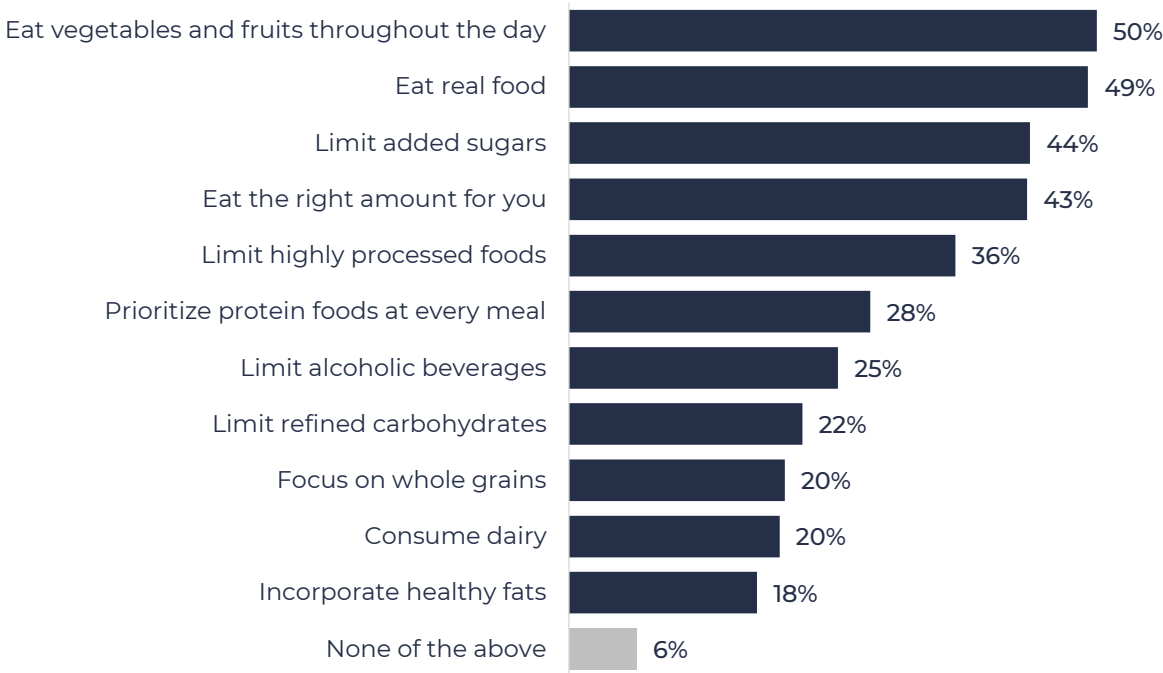
Awareness of the new Food Pyramid reached 83% in 2026, exceeding reported awareness of MyPlate in 2024 (76%) and 2025 (77%).



With respect to key dietary guidance messages, half of Americans say they made an effort to eat vegetables and fruits throughout the day and eat real food in the past twelve months.

More than four in ten say they tried to limit added sugars (44%) and/or eat the right amount (43%) in the past twelve months. About one in three say they tried to limit highly processed foods (36%), while one in four tried to prioritize protein at every meal (28%) and/or limit alcoholic beverages (25%). About two in ten tried to limit refined carbohydrates (22%), focus on whole grains (20%), consume dairy (20%), and/or incorporate healthy fats (18%).

Dietary Guidance Efforts Made By Americans In The Past 12 Months



Among Americans who made a dietary guidance-related effort in the past twelve months, eating fruits and vegetables throughout the day was most often reported to have the greatest impact on their health.

Nearly two in ten (19%) say eating fruits and vegetables throughout the day had the greatest impact on their health, while slightly fewer cite eating the right amount (16%), eating real food (16%), and limiting added sugars (13%).

Dietary Action With Greatest Impact Overall Health
Among Americans who made the effort in the past 12 months



Totals may not add up or equal 100% due to rounding

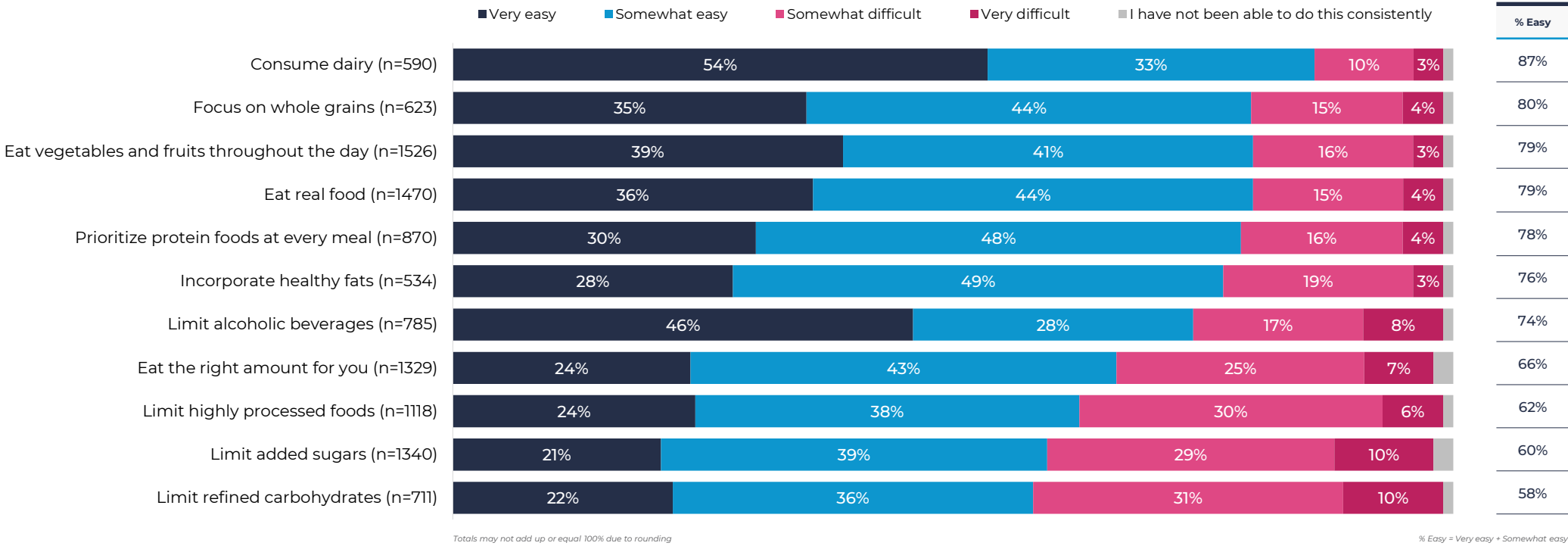


Among Americans who made a dietary guidance-related effort in the past twelve months, consuming dairy was the easiest to maintain.

While consuming dairy was reported as the easiest dietary guidance-related effort to do consistently, limiting refined carbohydrates, added sugars, and highly processed foods, as well as eating the right amount were the most difficult.

Ease Of Maintaining Dietary Guidance Efforts By Americans

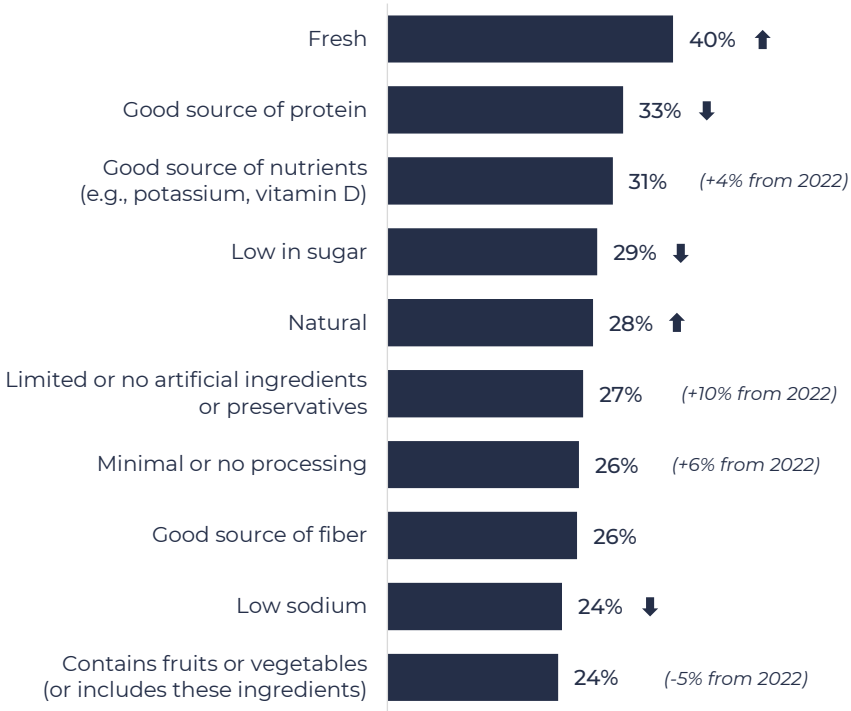
Among those who made the effort in the past 12 months



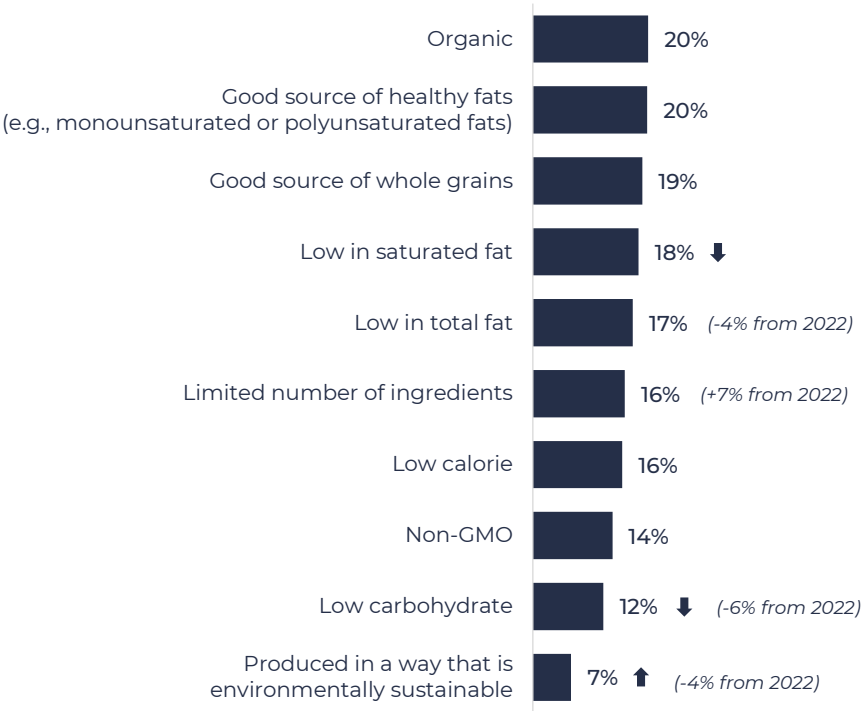
“Fresh” retakes the top spot in how Americans define a healthy food, while “Low in sugar” falls out of the top three for the first time.

Compared with 2025, more Americans use “Natural,” “Fresh,” and/or “Produced in a way that is environmentally sustainable” to define a healthy food. Fewer use “Good source of protein,” “Low in sugar,” “Low sodium,” “Low carbohydrate,” and/or “Low in saturated fat.” Ingredient- and processing-related considerations have risen the most since 2022.

Criteria Americans Use To Define A Healthy Food
Top 10



Criteria Americans Use To Define A Healthy Food
Bottom 10

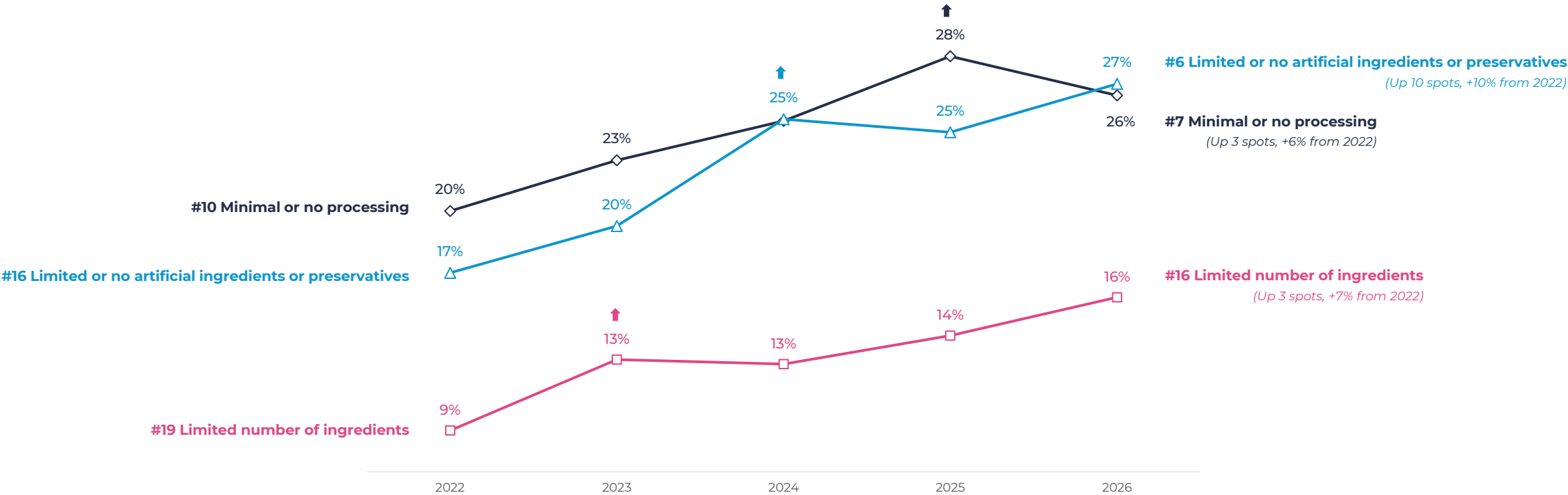


Americans increasingly consider ingredient- and processing-related criteria for defining a healthy food.

Compared to 2022, the three biggest changes among criteria Americans use to define a healthy food are “Limited or no artificial ingredients or preservatives” (+10%), “Limited number of ingredients” (+7%), and “Minimal or no processing” (+6%).

Ingredient- & Processing-Related Criteria Used To Define A Healthy Food

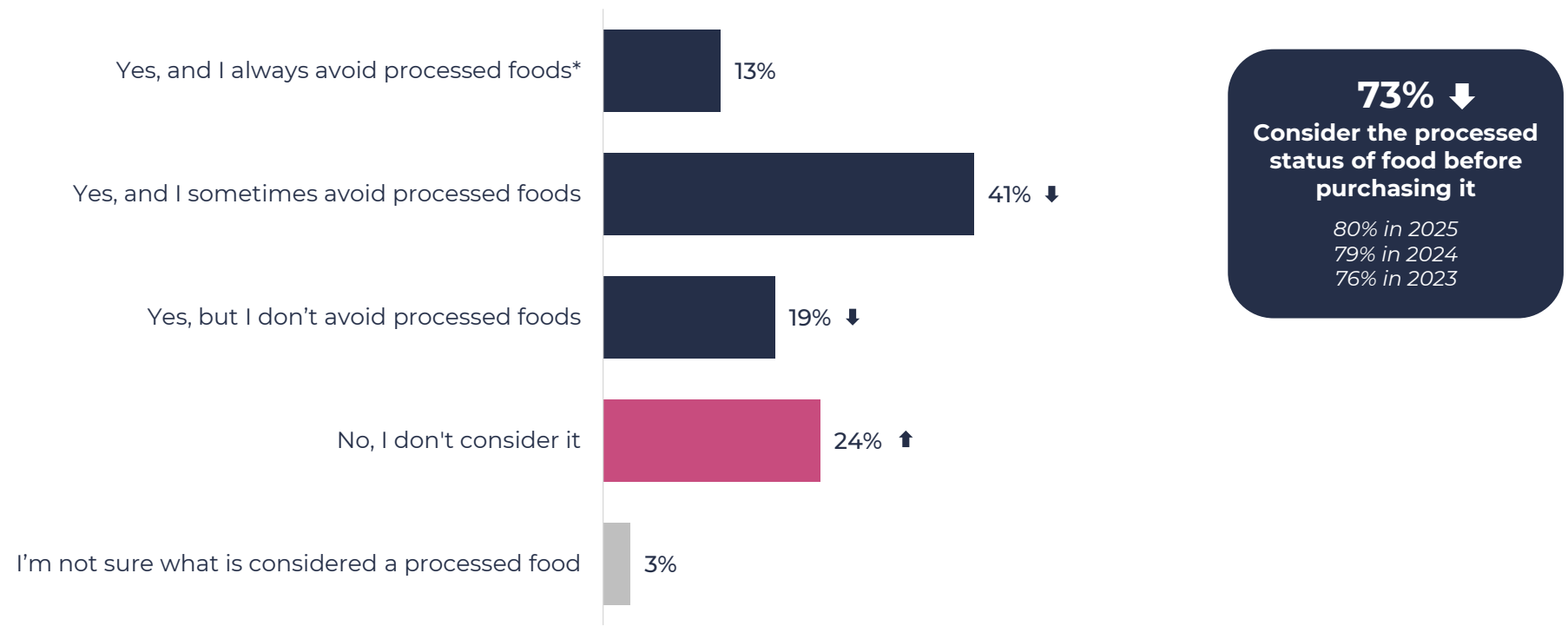
Percent selecting as a top 5 criteria to define a healthy food



Nearly three in four Americans consider whether food is processed before buying it, down from 2025.

In 2026, 73% say processing factors into their food purchase decisions, down from 80% in 2025. More than four in ten (43%) either consider processing but do not avoid processed foods (19%) or do not consider processing when buying food (24%), while just 3% are unsure what qualifies as processed.

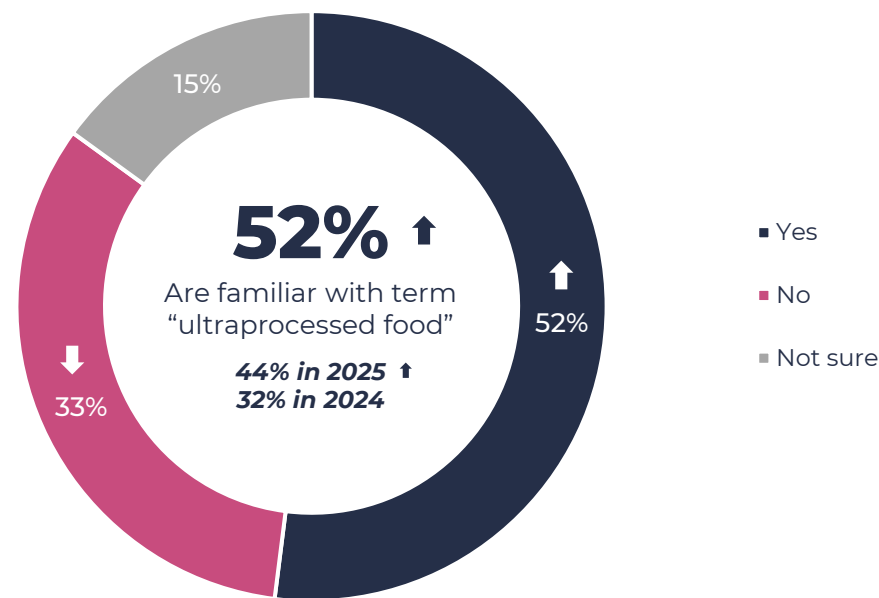
Considers Whether Food Is Processed Prior To Purchase



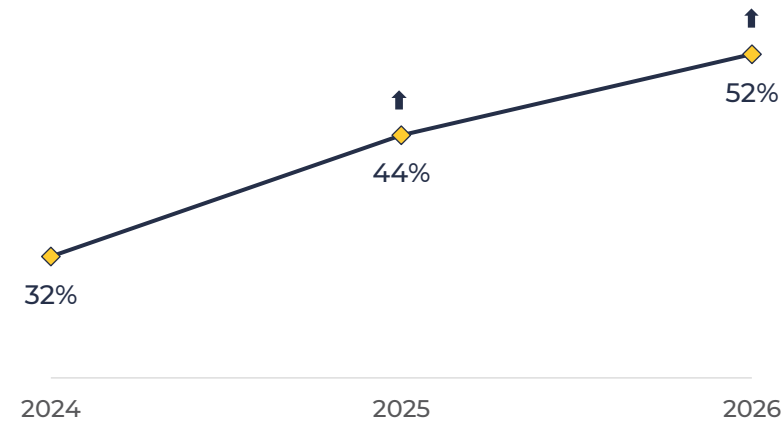
More than half of Americans are familiar with the term “ultraprocessed food,” an 8-point jump from 2025 and a 20-point jump from 2024.

Familiarity with the term “ultraprocessed food” continues to rise, with 52% of Americans reporting familiarity compared with 33% reporting unfamiliarity. Meanwhile, uncertainty remains steady, with 15% saying they are not sure (16% in 2024 and 2025).

Familiarity With The Term “Ultraprocessed Food”



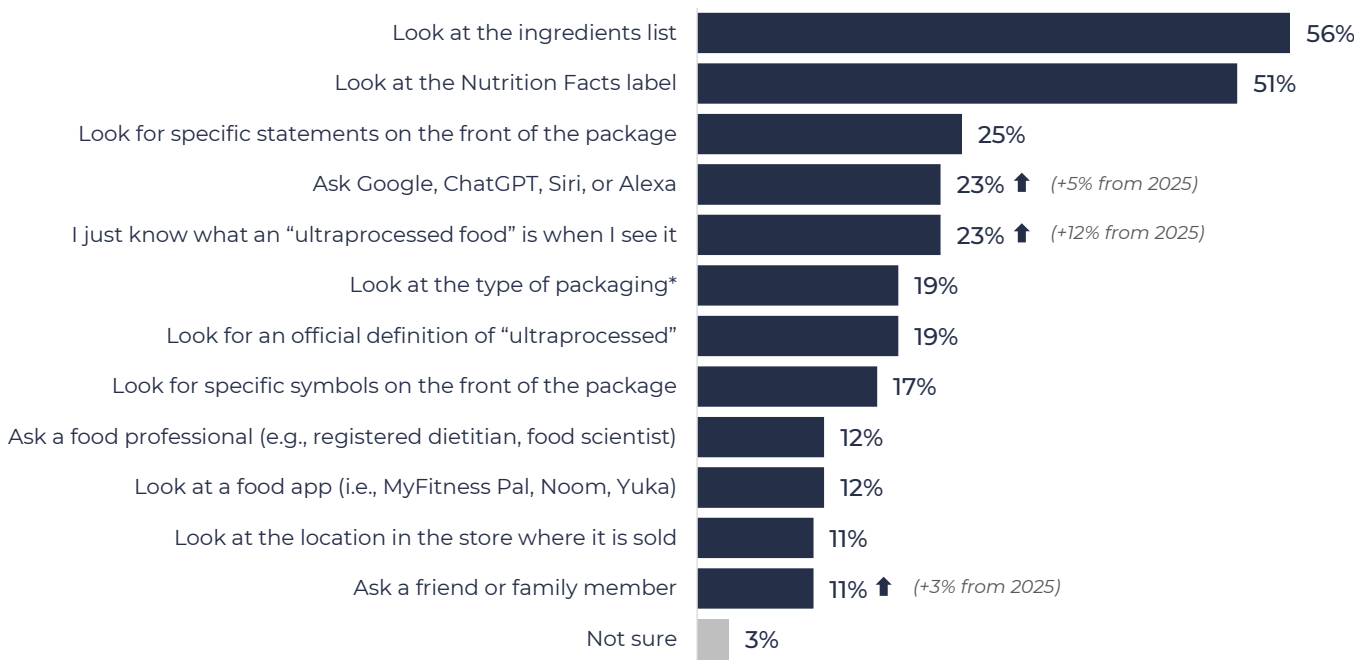
3-Year Trend



Among Americans who are familiar with the term “ultraprocessed food,” at least half would look to the ingredients list and/or the Nutrition Facts label to decide whether a food is ultraprocessed.

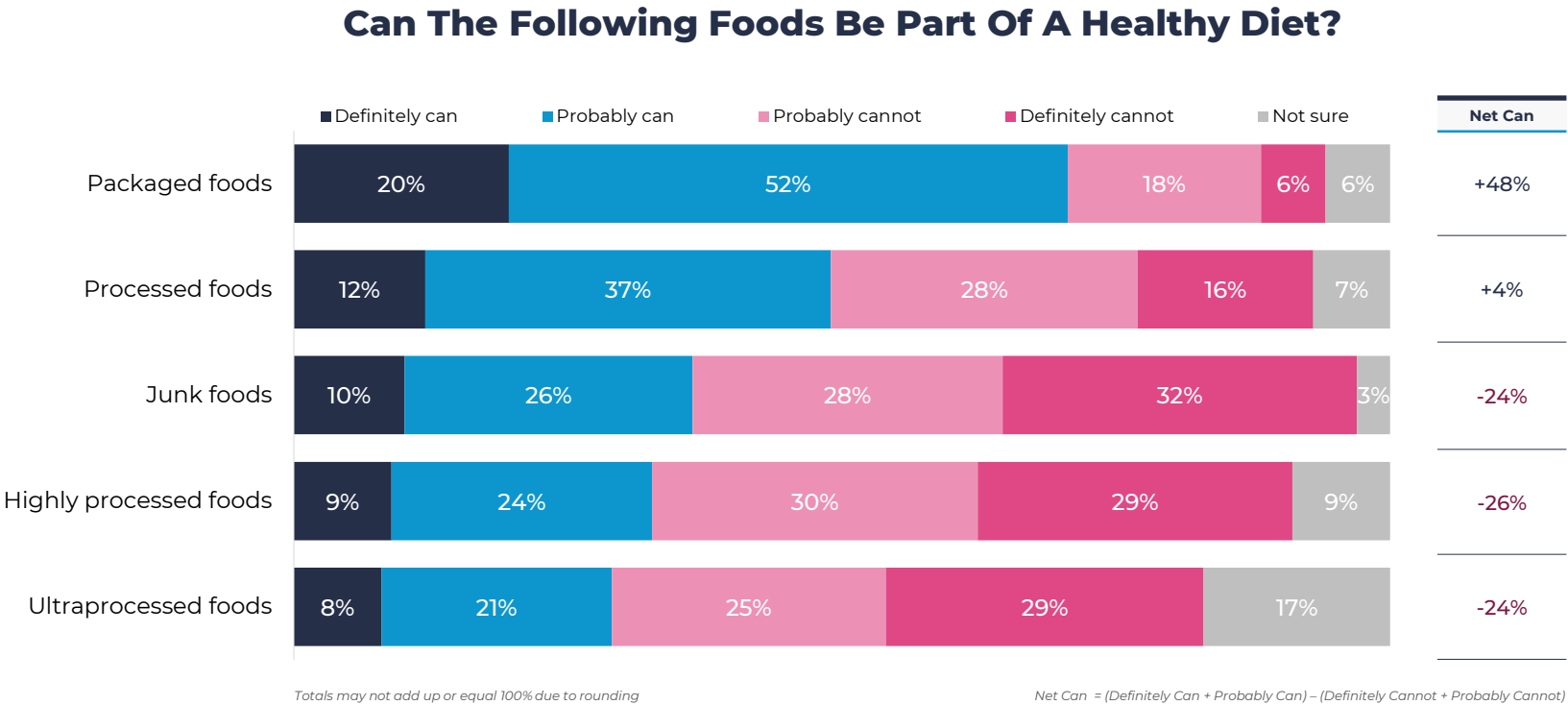
Compared with 2025, more Americans say they would use an AI assistant (23%), use their own judgement (23%), or consult a friend or family member (11%) to determine whether a food is ultraprocessed.

Approaches To Identifying Ultraprocessed Food
Of those familiar with the term "ultraprocessed food"



Americans are more likely to say packaged foods and processed foods can be part of a healthy diet than junk foods, highly processed foods, or ultraprocessed foods.

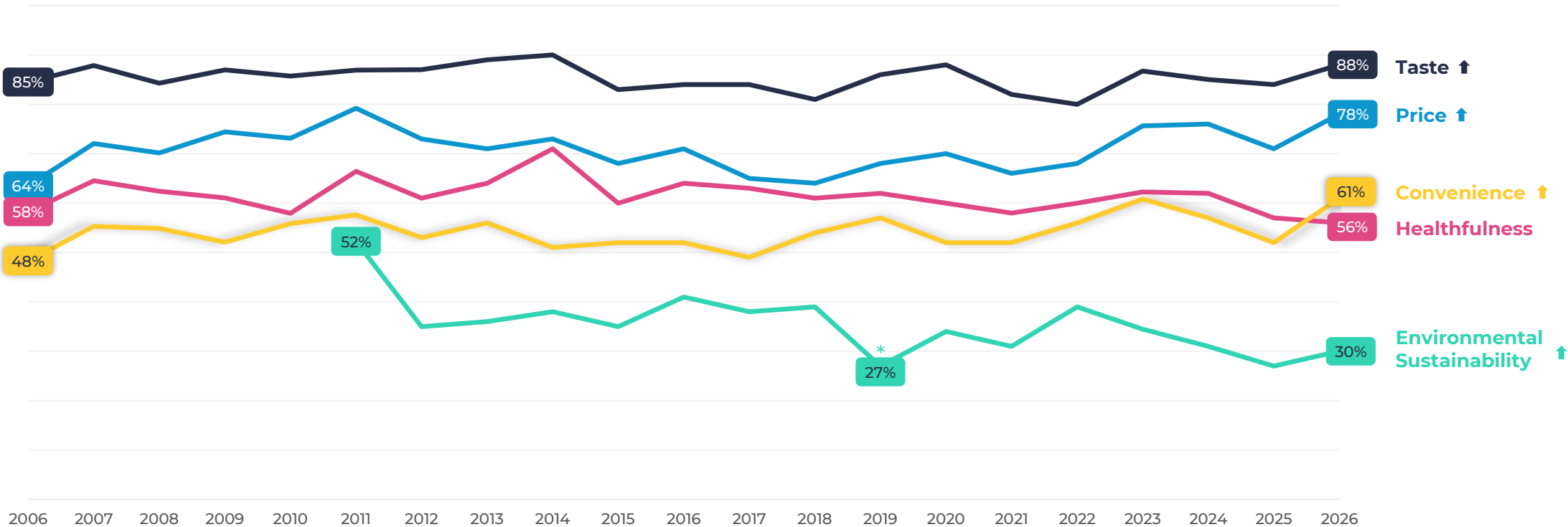
More than seven in ten Americans (71%) say packaged foods can be part of a healthy diet, and half (49%) say the same of processed foods. Fewer say junk foods (36%), highly processed foods (33%), and ultraprocessed foods (29%) can fit.



For the first time in the 21-year history of the *IFIC Food & Health Survey*, convenience surpasses healthfulness as a top purchase driver.

Taste (88%) and price (78%) continue to have the greatest impact on food and beverage purchase decisions in 2026, while convenience ranks ahead of healthfulness (61% vs. 56%) and environmental sustainability remains the least influential (30%).

Food & Beverage Purchase Drivers Over Time
Americans reporting an impact of 4 or 5 on a 5-pt scale

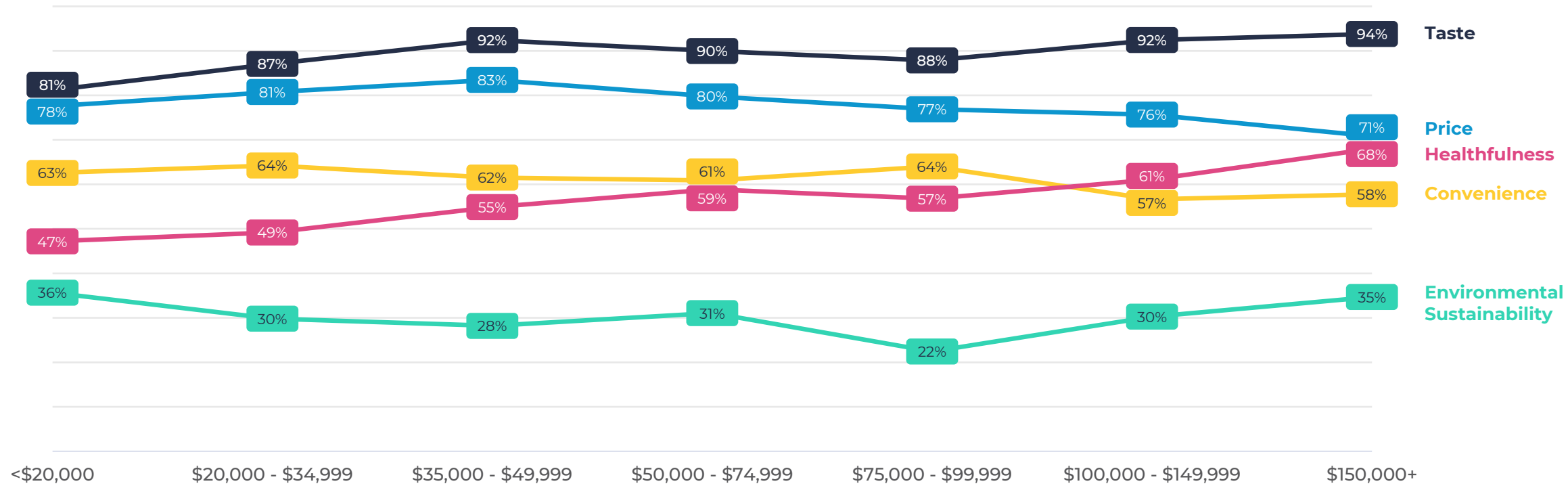


[TREND 2006-2026] How much of an impact do the following have on your decision to buy foods and beverages? (n=3005)
Note: Responses were rated on a 1-5 scale, where 1 = "No impact" and 5 = "A great impact"
Note: Arrows indicate statistical significance vs. 2025
*In 2019, "Sustainability" was changed to "Environmental Sustainability"

Higher-income Americans place greater emphasis on taste and healthfulness and less on price and convenience.

The influence of taste and healthfulness increases as household income rises, while price and convenience become less influential. Among households earning \$100,000 or more, healthfulness surpasses convenience, unlike the overall population.

Food & Beverage Purchase Drivers By Annual Household Income
Americans reporting an impact of 4 or 5 on a 5-pt scale



Special & Commissioned IFIC Consumer Research



IFIC addresses the more complex and critical food topics through its Special & Commissioned Research Projects Program.

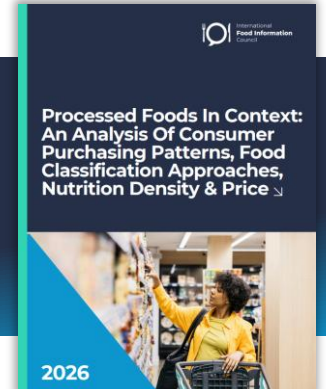
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DOWNLOAD THE SURVEYS
on ifc.org



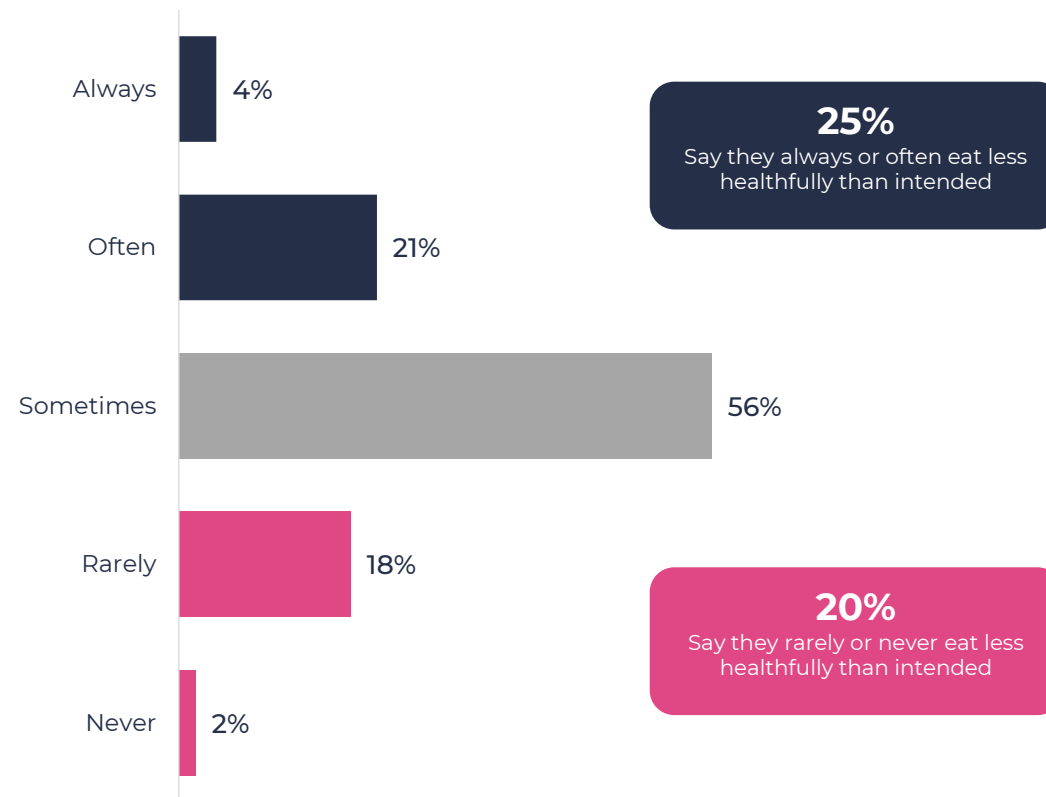
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Eight in ten Americans report eating less healthfully than they intended at least sometimes during the past month.

One-quarter (25%) say they always (4%) or often (21%) ate less healthfully than they intended during the past month while two in ten (20%) report having done so rarely (18%) or never (2%).

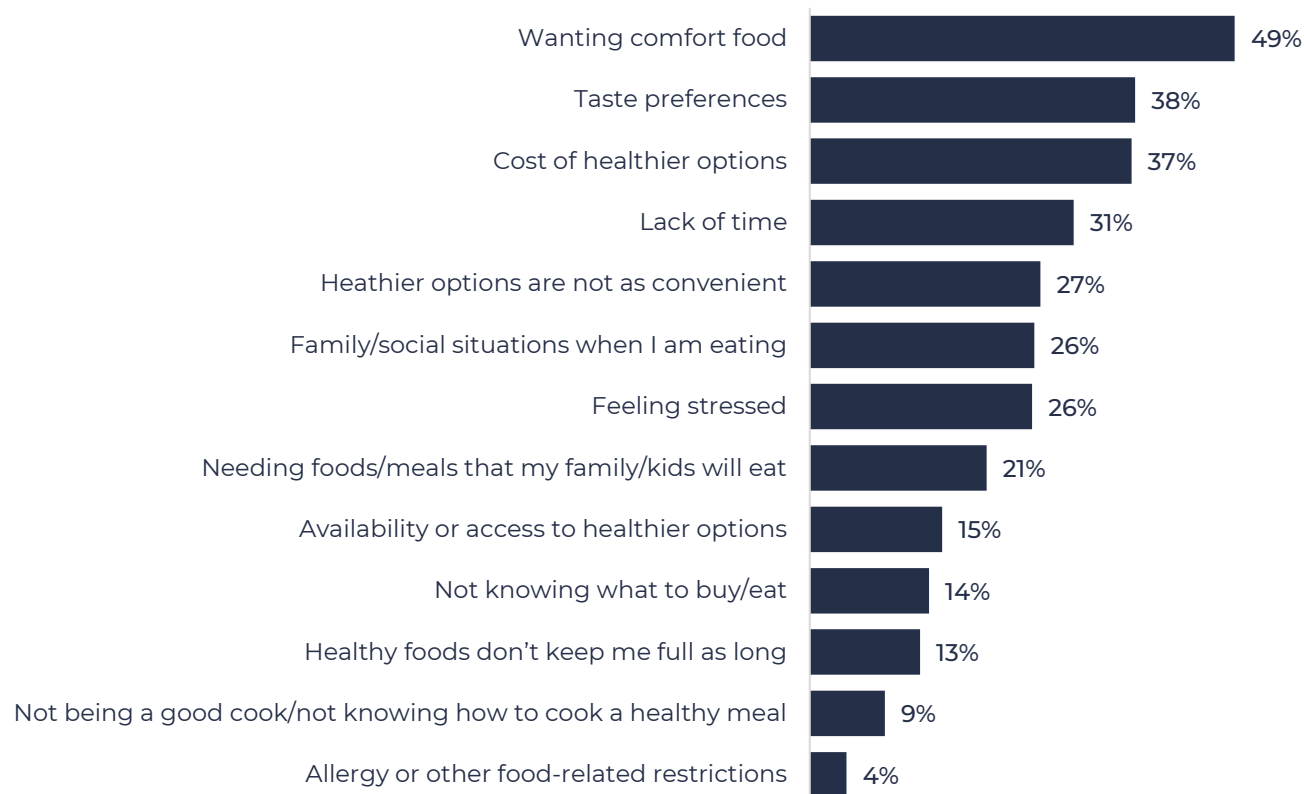
Frequency Of Eating Less Healthfully Than Intended In The Past Month



Among those who report eating less healthfully than intended, the most common reported barriers are wanting comfort food, taste preferences, cost and convenience of healthier options, and time.

Barriers To Eating As Healthfully As Intended

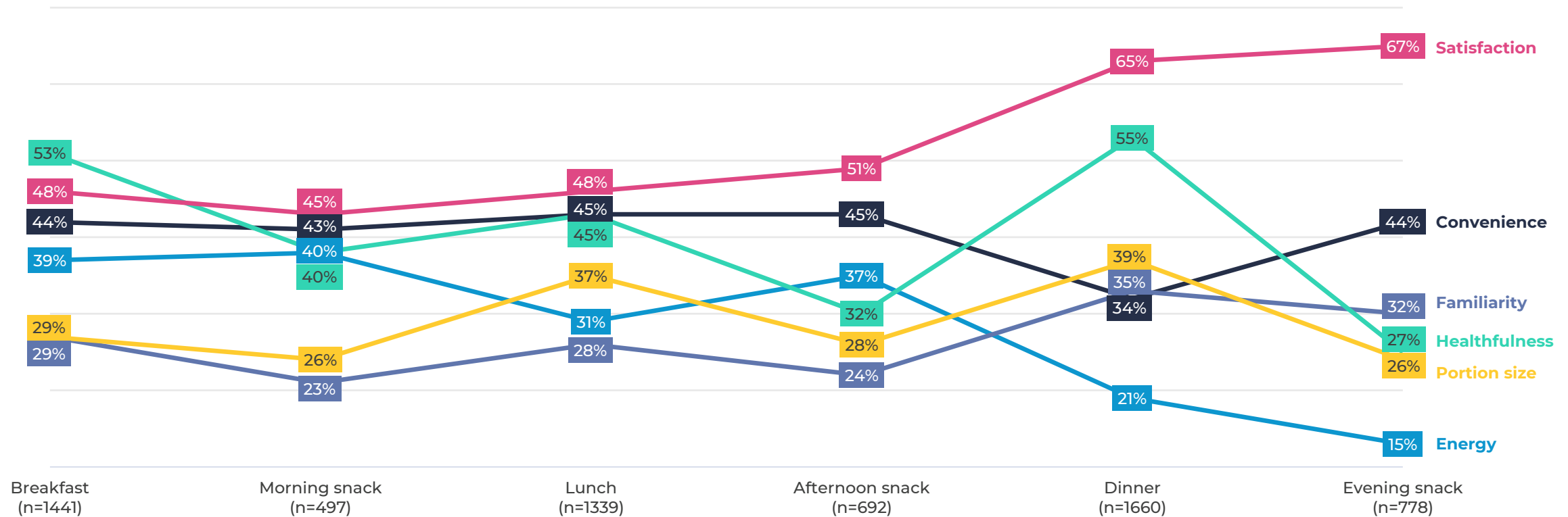
If ate less healthfully than intended at least sometimes during the past month



Among Americans who typically eat meals and snacks at home, healthfulness leads earlier in the day eating locations (breakfast and lunch), while satisfaction drives dinner and evening choices.

Reasons For Food Choices Made By Meal Occasion

If typically eats that meal or snack with food from home

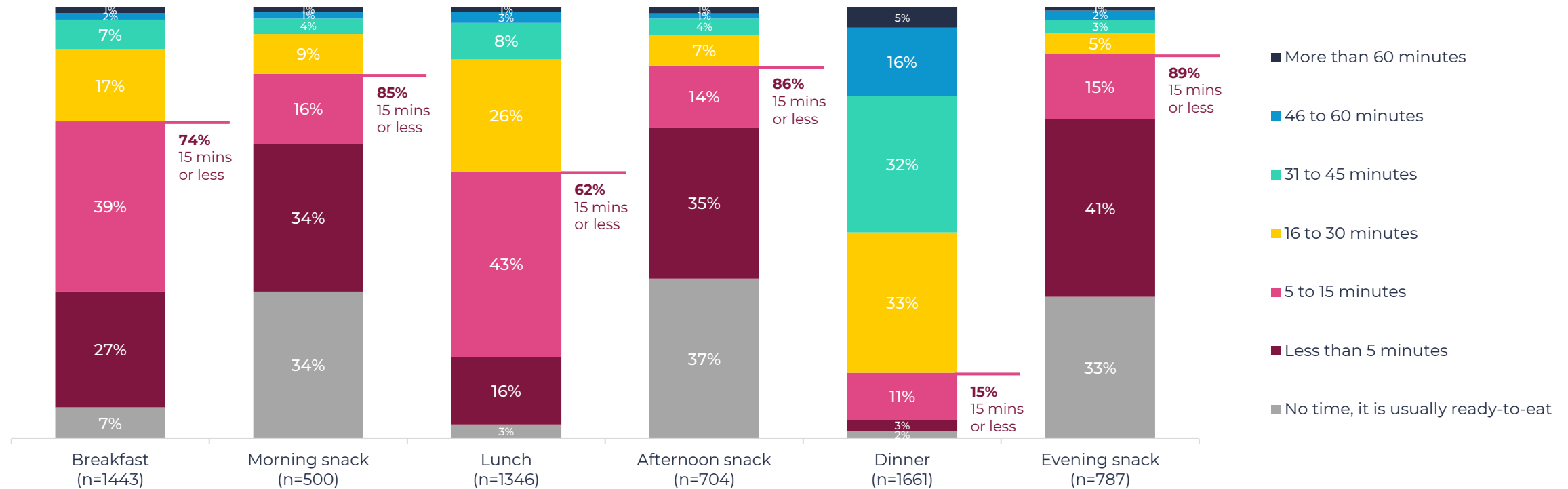


Among Americans who typically eat meals and snacks at home, most spend fifteen minutes or less preparing them, except dinner.

One in three (34%) spend less than five minutes or no time preparing breakfast, compared with two in ten (19%) for lunch and just 4% for dinner.

Time Spent Preparing Each Eating Occasion At Home

If typically eats that meal or snack with food from home

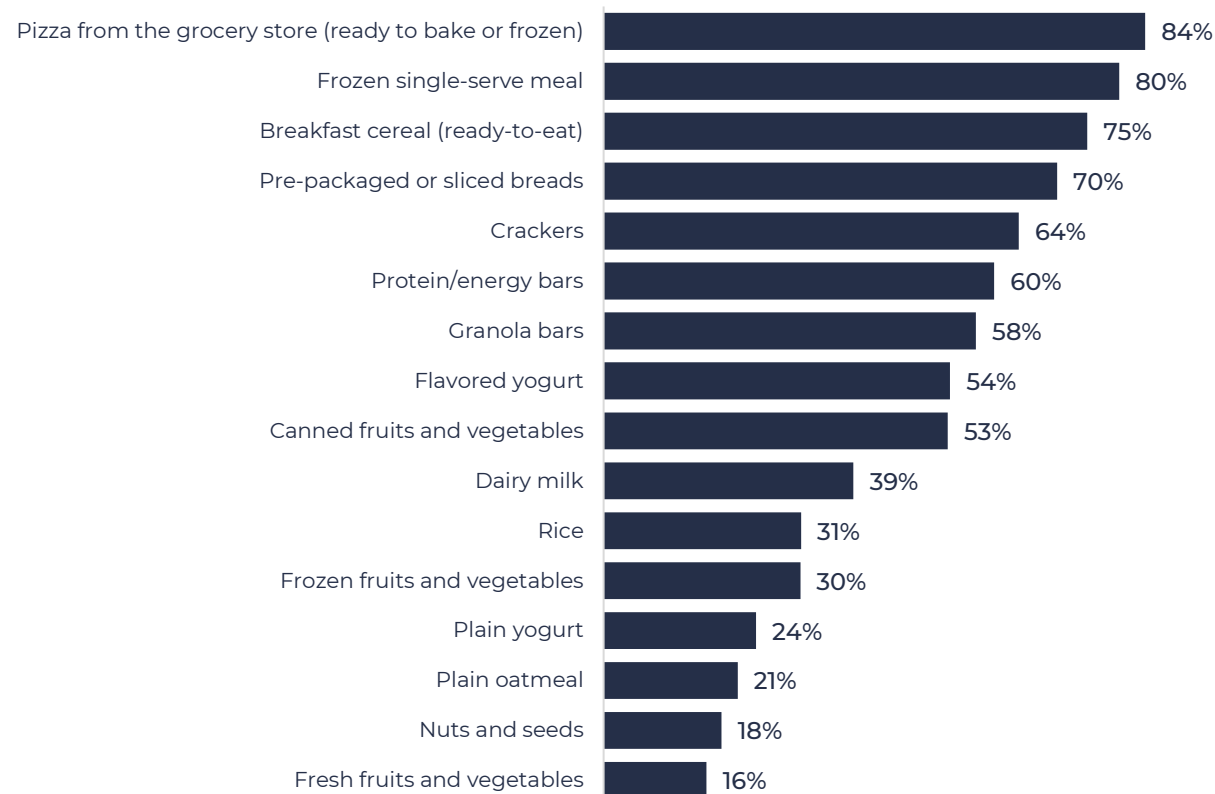


In general, the more processed Americans believe a food or beverage is, the less healthy they rate it.

Protein/energy bars are an exception: Although six in ten (60%) consider them highly or moderately processed, half (51%) rate them as healthy.

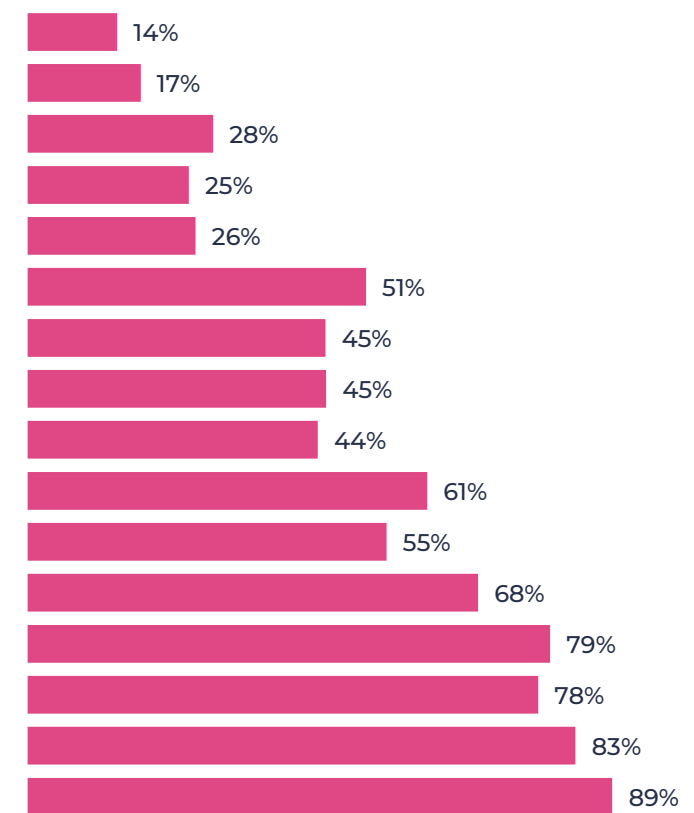
Perceived Level Of Processing

Percent rating 4 or 5 on 5-point scale



Perceived Healthfulness

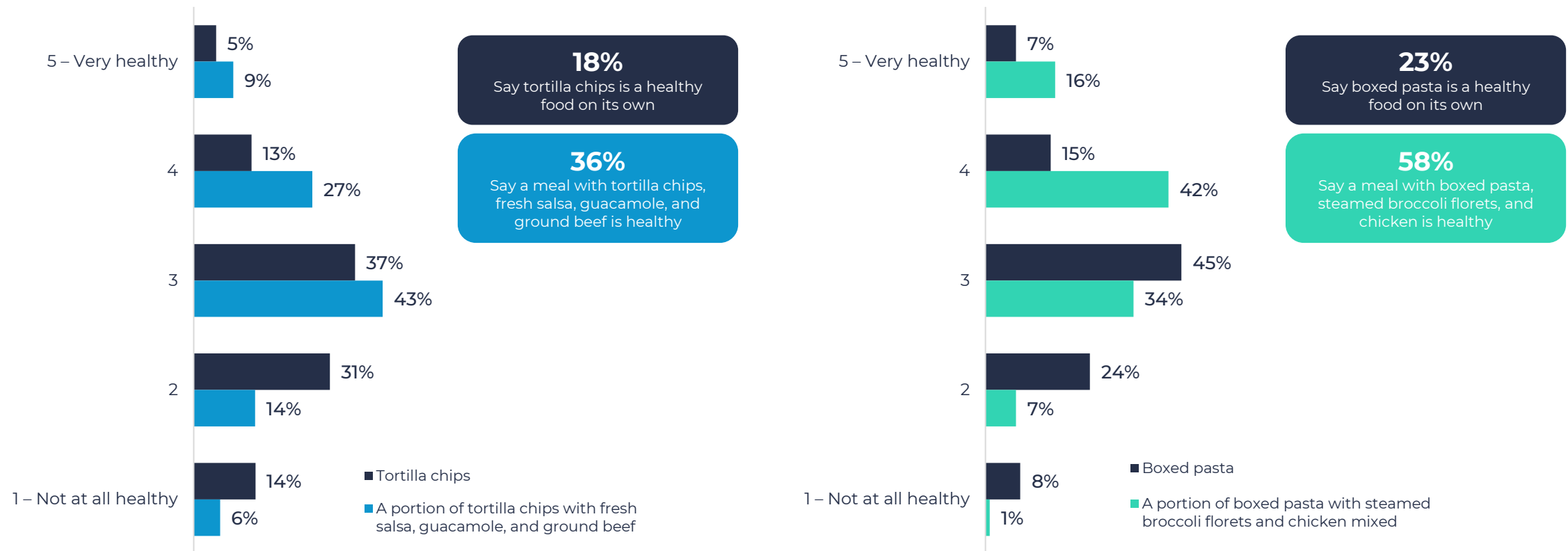
Percent rating 4 or 5 on 5-point scale



Perceptions of healthfulness vary depending on whether a food is eaten on its own or as part of a meal.

At least twice as many consider tortilla chips (36% vs. 18%) and boxed pasta (58% vs. 23%) healthy when eaten as part of a meal rather than on their own.

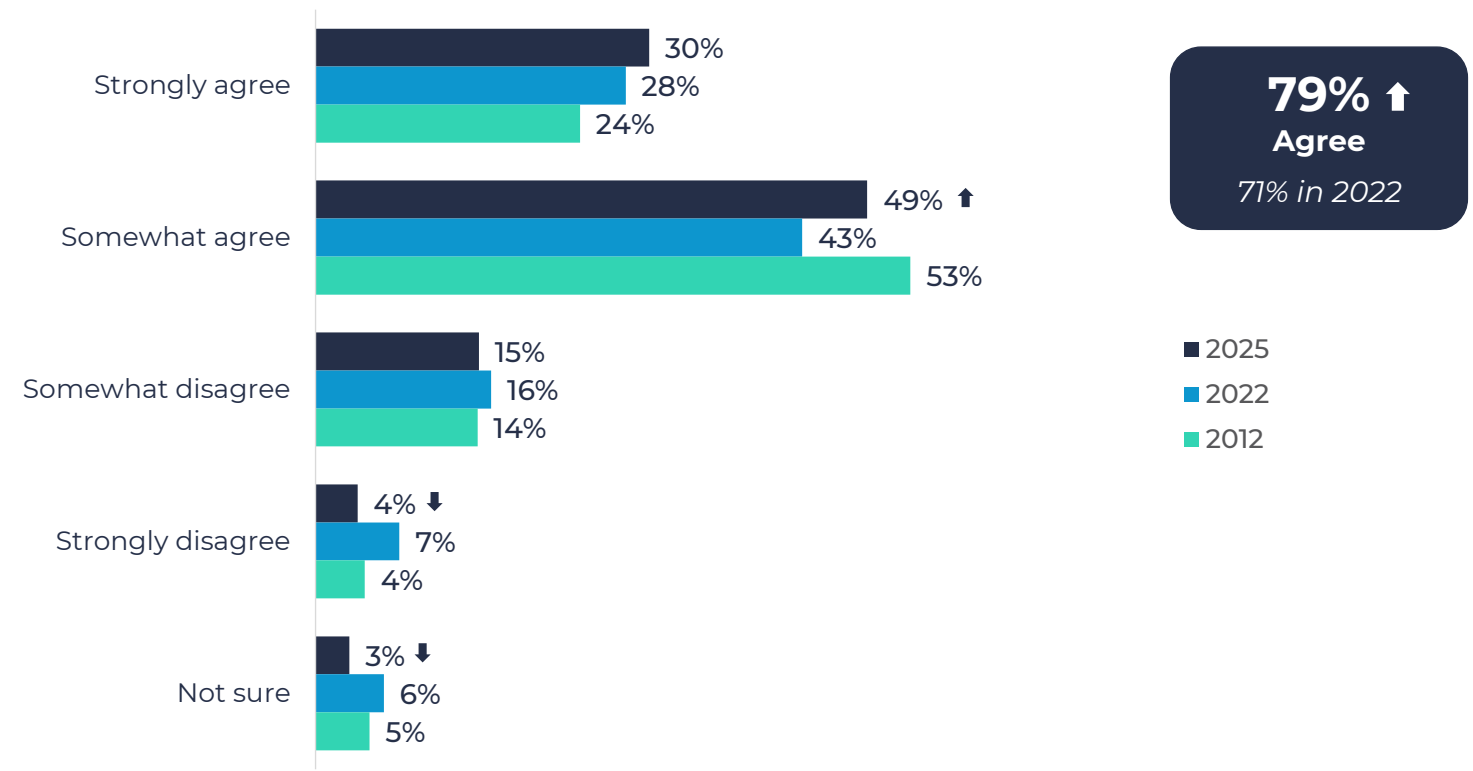
Perceived Healthfulness Of Individual Foods Vs. Those Foods As Part Of A Meal



Eight in ten Americans agree that it is hard to know what to believe about nutrition information because it seems to keep changing.

Overall agreement has risen from 71% in 2022, and the share who strongly agree has climbed to 30%, up from 24% in 2012. Meanwhile, fewer Americans strongly disagree (4%, down from 7% in 2022) and are unsure (3%, down from 6% in 2022 and 5% in 2012).

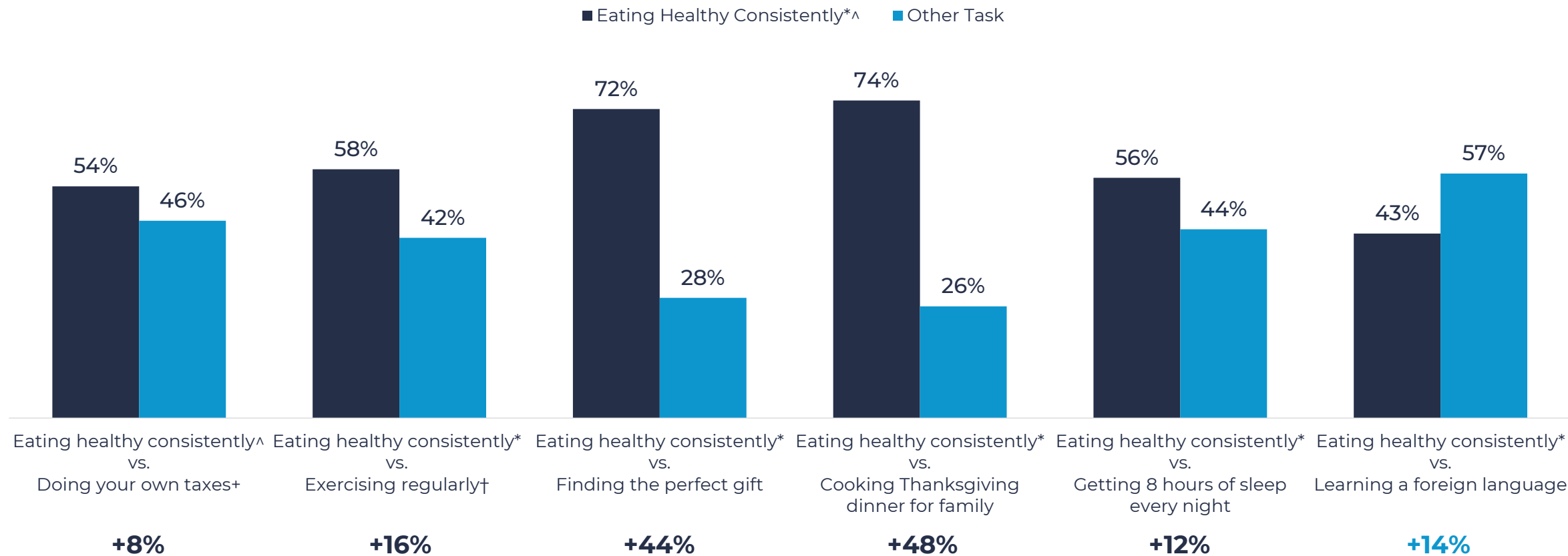
“Because nutrition information seems to keep changing, it’s hard to know what to believe”



Americans find it harder to consistently eat healthy than doing their taxes, exercising regularly, getting eight hours of sleep every night, finding the perfect gift, and preparing Thanksgiving dinner.

More Americans find it harder to learn a foreign language than to consistently eat a healthful diet.

Difficulty Of Eating Healthy Compared To Other Tasks





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THANK YOU

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