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Council

# Processed & Ultra-Processed Foods: Consumer Understanding, Perception & Sentiment

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*Risk Communication:  
Science vs. Perception – Increasing  
Challenges Navigating Mis/Dis-  
Information from Social Media*

JIFSAN-C3 Advisory Council  
Annual Symposium  
October 29, 2024





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## OUR VISION

A global environment where science informs food decisions.

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## 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 best-in-class research and consumer insights** to inform food, nutrition and health stakeholders.
- **Promote science communication** to positively impact consumer behavior and public health.
- **Convene critical thought leaders** to advance the food systems dialogue and science-based decision-making.



## **ABOUT IFIC GOVERNANCE**

IFIC is governed by a Board of Trustees, the majority of whom are from public academic institutions, along with an Assembly that includes government liaisons.

## **ABOUT IFIC FUNDING SUPPORT**

IFIC is supported primarily through grants and contributions from the broad-based food, beverage, and agricultural industry. IFIC does not lobby and does not represent any product, company, or industry.

## **ABOUT WENDY REINHARDT KAPSAK, MS, RDN**

More than 25 years working in food, nutrition and agriculture. Worked at IFIC from 2000-2012. From 2012-2016, served in various roles at what is now known as Bayer Crop Science. Served as President & CEO of the Produce for Better Health Foundation from 2017-2022. Returned to IFIC as President & CEO in 2023.

# Annual IFIC Food & Health Survey



Since 2006, IFIC has surveyed Americans about their food behaviors, beliefs, and perceptions.

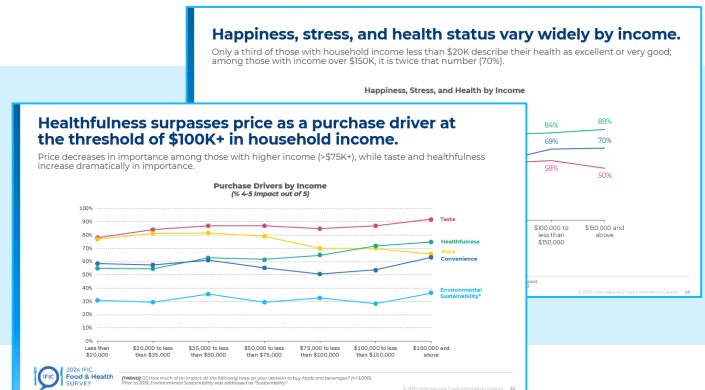
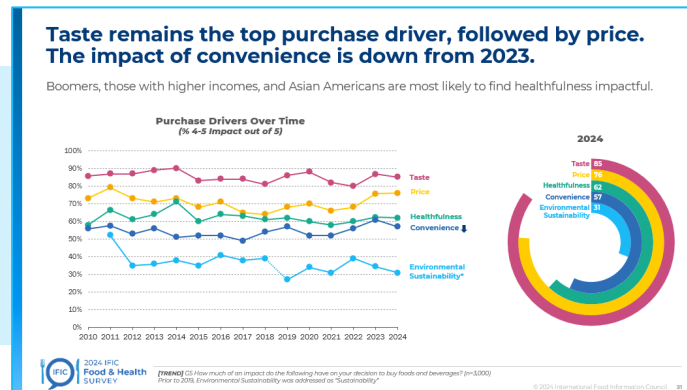
2024 marked the 19<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of the IFIC Food & Health Survey, making it one of the most influential and widely referenced annual consumer surveys in the U.S. for academic researchers, healthcare professionals, industry stakeholders, media, and policymakers.

2024 IFIC Food & Health SURVEY

IFIC's annual survey American consumers to understand perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors surrounding food and food-purchasing decisions.

**DOWNLOAD THE SURVEYS**  
on [foodinsight.org](https://www.foodinsight.org)

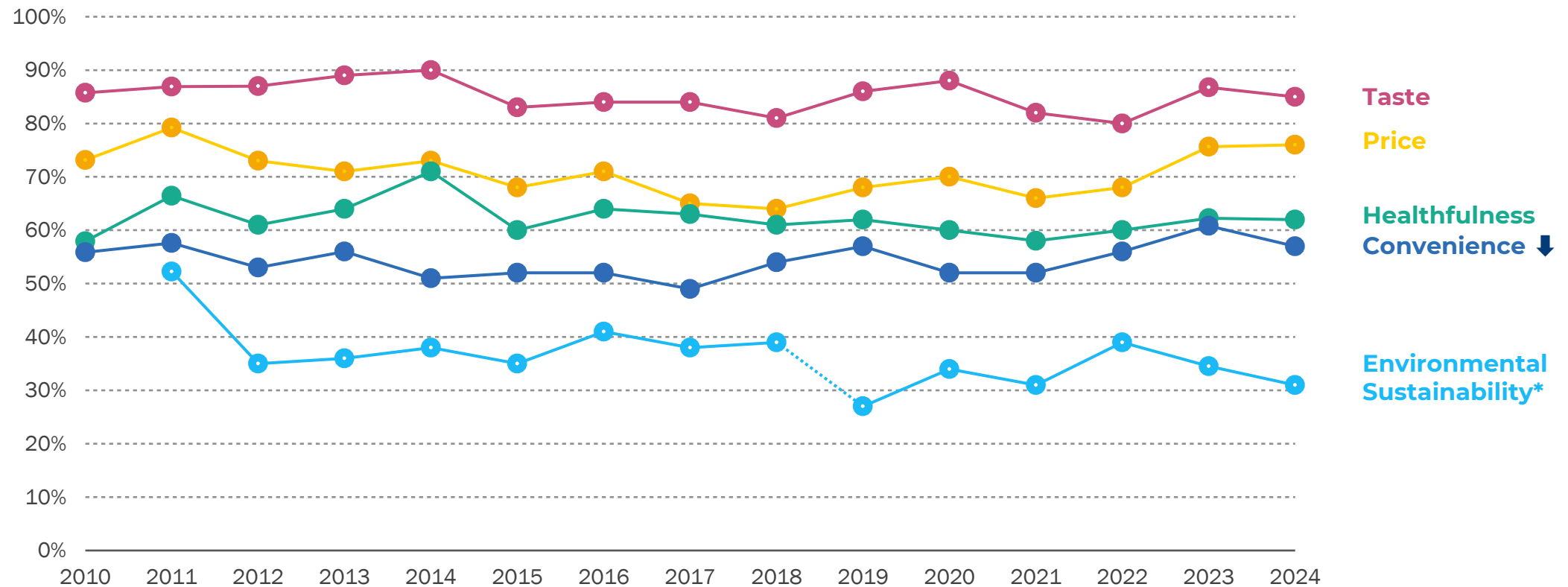
In 2024, we tripled our study population to perform more robust analyses of demographic groups.



# Taste remains the top purchase driver, followed by price. The impact of convenience is down from 2023.

Baby Boomers, those with higher household incomes, and Asian Americans are most likely to find healthfulness impactful.

**Food and Beverage Purchase Drivers Over Time**  
 (% reporting impact of 4 or 5 out of a 5-point scale)

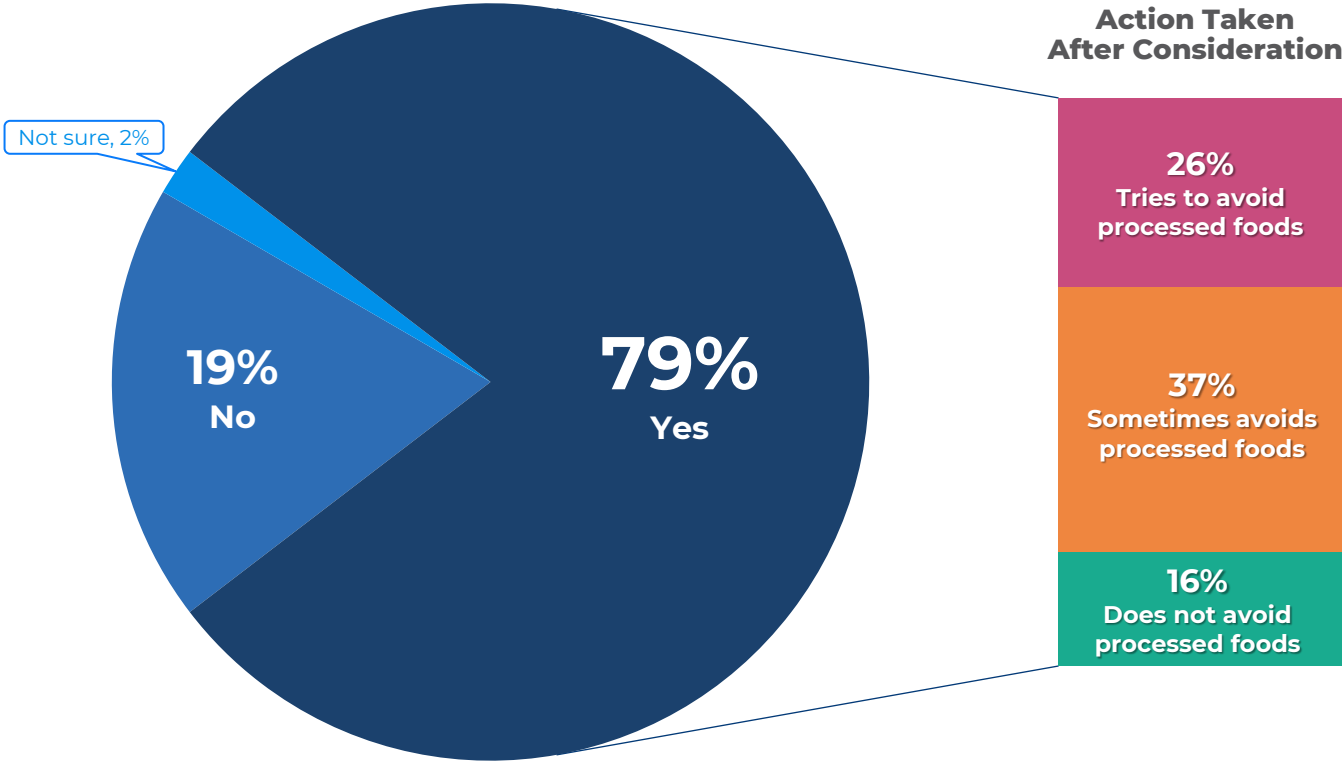




# 8 in 10 Americans consider if a food is processed prior to purchasing it.

Among those who consider if a food is processed, most say they avoid processed foods at least sometimes.

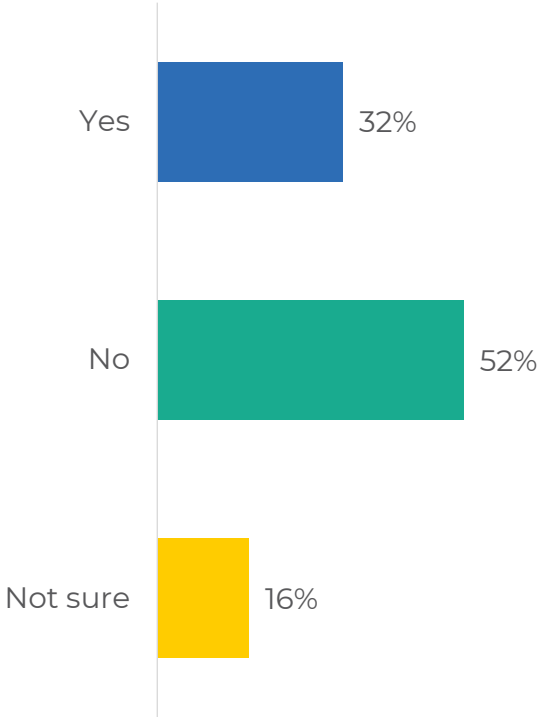
## Considers if a Food is Processed Prior to Purchase



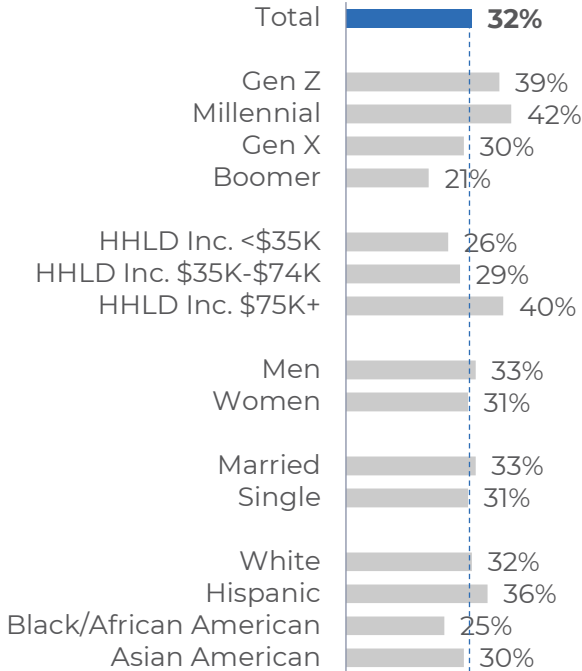
# 1 in 3 Americans are familiar with the term “ultraprocessed food.”

Younger generations and college graduates, as well as those with higher household income, children under 18 years, in excellent or very good self-reported health, and who have followed a specific eating style in the past year are most likely to be familiar with the term “ultraprocessed food.”

## Familiarity with the Term "Ultraprocessed Food"



## “Yes” by Subgroups



# Monthly IFIC Spotlight Surveys



IFIC generates monthly consumer insights through our Spotlight Surveys.

Each month, we engage 1,000 Americans to measure knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about timely and relevant topics in food. Our Spotlight Surveys align with the topics of our monthly expert webinar series, educational resources, messaging, and content development.

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on [foodinsight.org](https://foodinsight.org)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than half of Americans (56%) replace traditional meals with snacking or by eating smaller meals, according to the [2024 IFIC Food & Health Survey](#). Emerging as its own eating pattern, snacking has become increasingly popular among consumers, especially Gen Z, Millennials, women, and those whose relationship status is single.

While [nutrition scholars](#) have struggled to formally define the word snack, nearly all Americans tell us that when they eat or drink something between meals, to them, it is a snack. A rarity that widespread agreement emerges around food and nutrition, this noteworthy finding is one of many eye-opening takeaways from the [IFIC Spotlight Survey](#) on snacking.

As consumers make food decisions, [nothing outcompetes taste and price](#); they want to enjoy the food they eat, and they require affordability—the foundational elements consumers need before considering healthfulness. To the matter of taste, most consumers favor sweet and salty flavors in their snacks, followed by the sensation of crunchiness, and the inclusion of beverages.

Likewise, consumers tend to snack spontaneously, and very few emphasize nutrition. Half (51%) say they have calorie goals for their snacks, and only one in ten consumers confirm they leverage their typical snacks as a moment to add nutrition.

Whether a result of busy schedules or on-the-go lifestyles, data from this [IFIC Spotlight Survey](#) show that opportunities exist to help consumers get more from their snacks—more nutrition without sacrificing taste. Snacking is poised to be one eating occasion to meet multiple goals, and understanding the heterogeneity of consumer desires and their associated snacking [profiles](#) is an important element to meet the challenges associated with snacking and to fully realize the health and nutrition opportunities. IFIC commissioned this [IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Consumer Perceptions of Snacking](#) to study U.S. consumer mindset related to snacking.

Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Consumer Perceptions of Snacking



IMPLICATIONS

American diet quality rating, as measured by the [Healthy Eating Index](#), is 58 out of 100. Often described as a failing score, health professionals and nutrition scientists agree that improving diet quality is a priority to advance health and well-being of Americans. Specifically, resources like the [Cooking Guidelines for Americans](#) provide advice on "what promotes health, and help prevent chronic disease."

The emergence of snacking as its own eating occasion offers an opportunity to enhance overall health in the United States. Support to improve the healthfulness of snacking includes: tips for plant-based snacking, more information about all-cause mortality, and reminders or prompts to choose high-nutrient options for dietary needs and preferences.

Incorporating foods and beverages rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and American diet quality. While most guidelines and professional advice encourage every-day snacking, which presents a challenge for consumers, it also presents an opportunity to help them meet their needs and help them enjoy their snacks, while still eating and beverages.

In other words, it will take more work to help consumers and help them enjoy their snacks, while still eating and beverages.

Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Consumer Perceptions of Snacking

### More Americans say they snack in the afternoon and evening, but morning snacks get highest net healthy rating.

Net healthy rating of snacks steadily declines throughout the day from Morning (+34%) to Late-Night (-1%).

Time of Day	Healthy 45%	Unhealthy 55%	Net Healthy Rating
Typical morning snack	34%	29%	+34%
Typical afternoon snack	33%	30%	+27%
Typical evening snack	1%	28%	-17%
Typical late-night snack	3%	32%	-1%

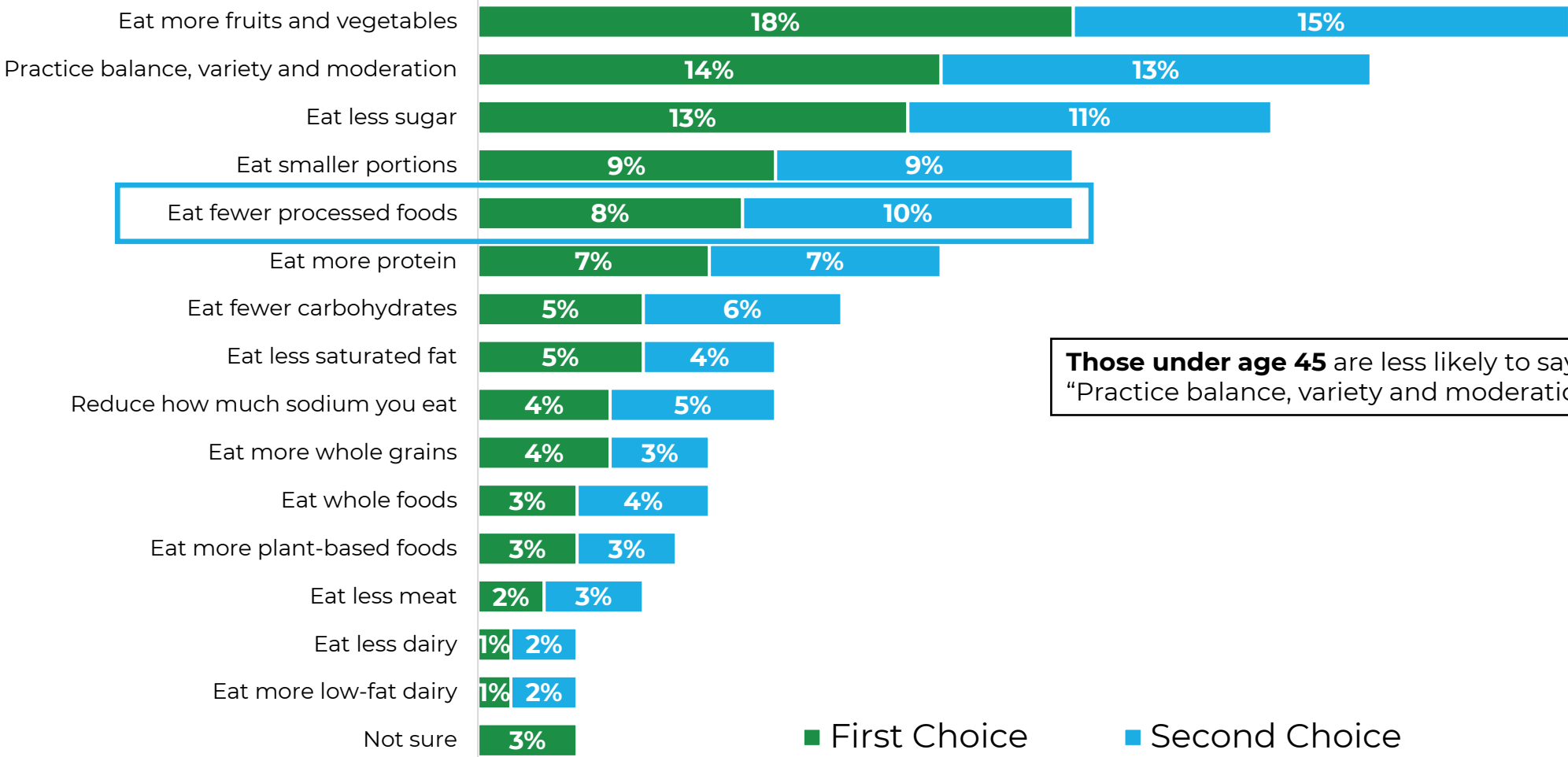
\*Net healthy rating is calculated as the difference between the percentage of consumers who report eating healthy and the percentage who report eating unhealthy. \*\*Net healthy rating is calculated as the difference between the percentage of consumers who report eating healthy and the percentage who report eating unhealthy.

© 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Consumer Perceptions of Snacking



# Eating more fruits/veggies viewed as most important to eat healthier.

*Balance, variety, and moderation are also seen as critical practices for improving diet.*



**Those under age 45** are less likely to say "Practice balance, variety and moderation."

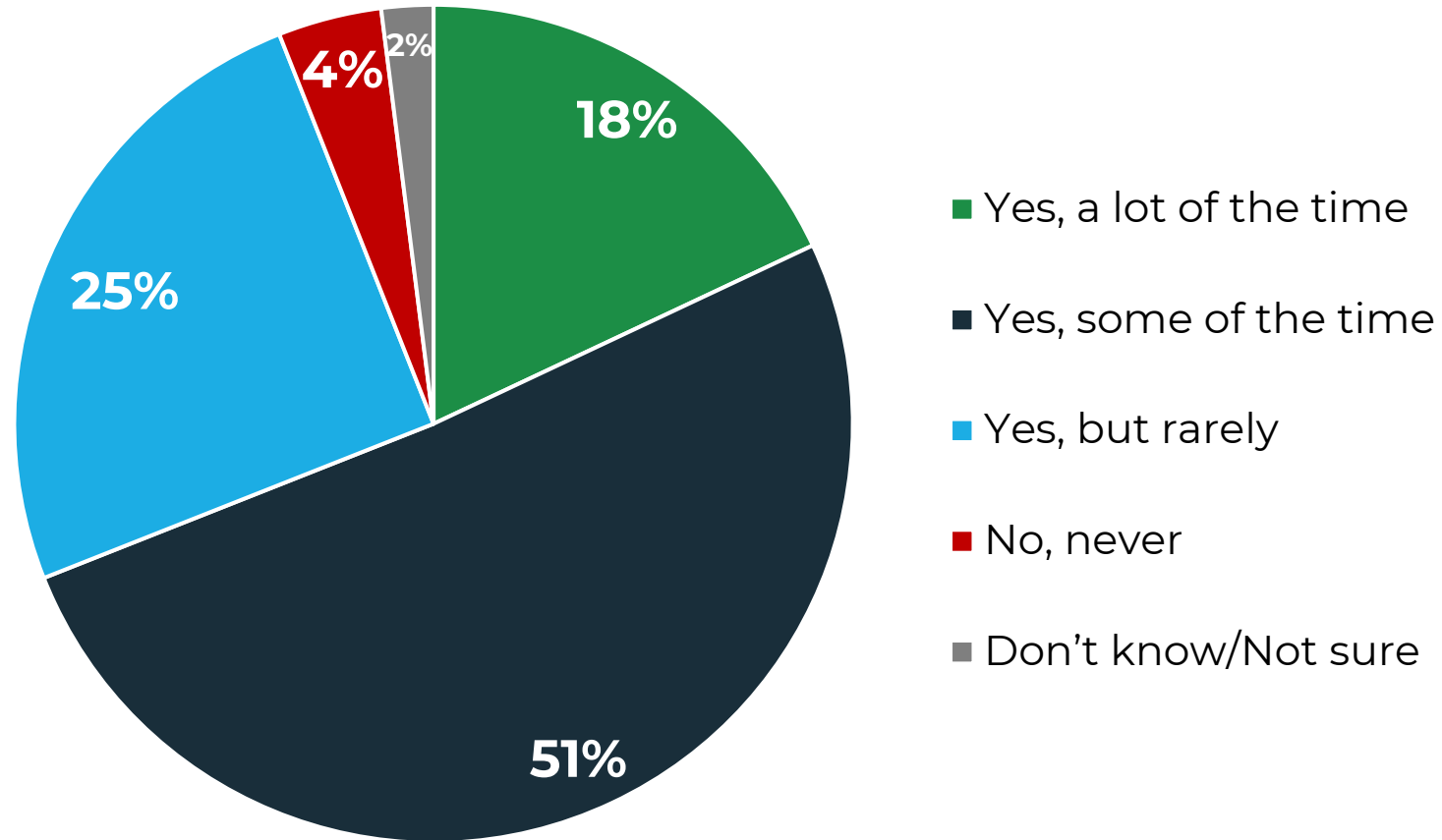
**Q2.** What do you believe are the most important actions you can take to eat healthier? Select top 2, with 1 being the most important.

**Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: Public Perceptions of Processed Foods**



# Very few Americans say they never eat processed foods.

More than 3 in 4 say they eat them at least some of the time.

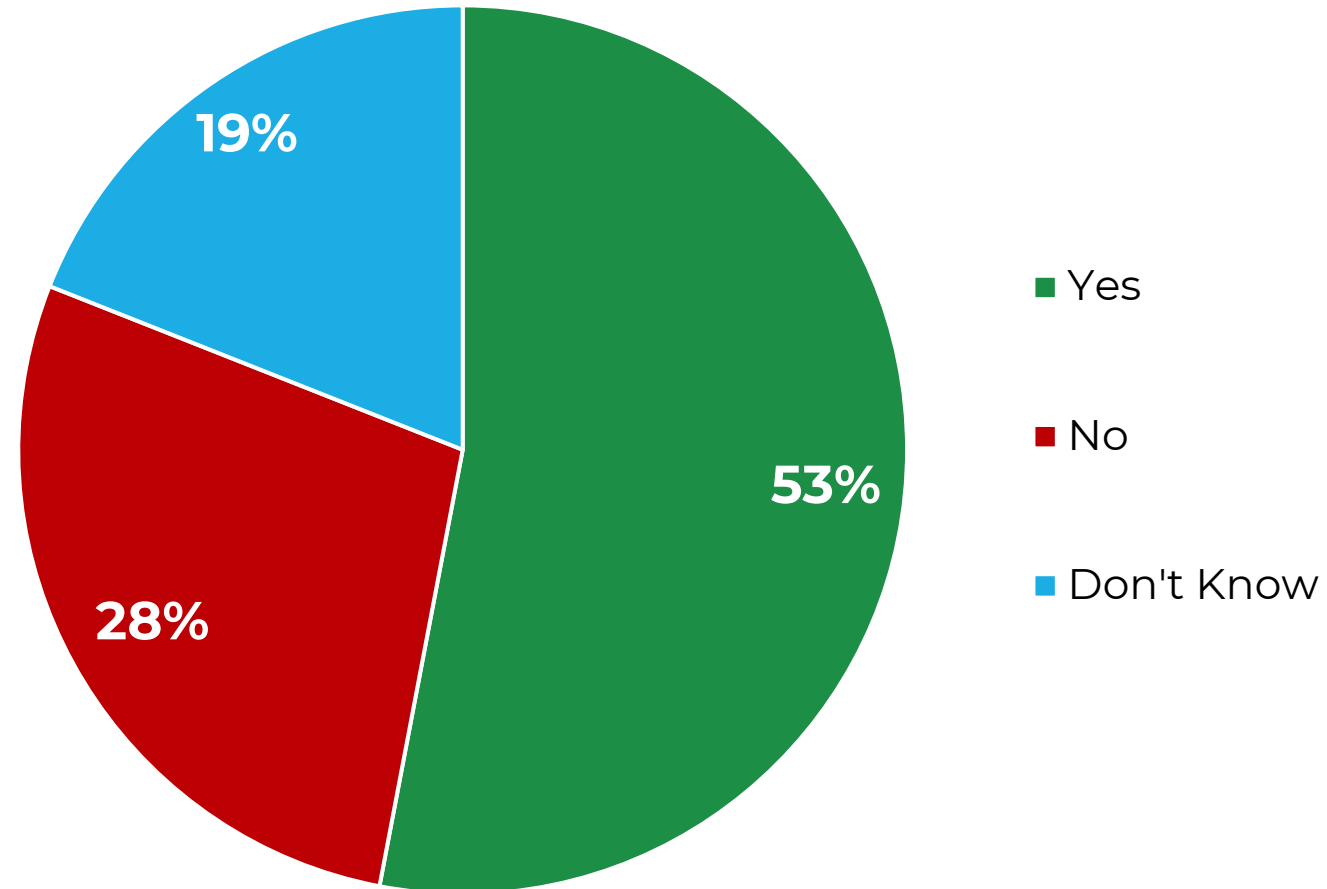


Q5. In general, do you consume processed foods?

Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: Public Perceptions of Processed Foods

# More than half believe processed foods can be part of a healthy diet.

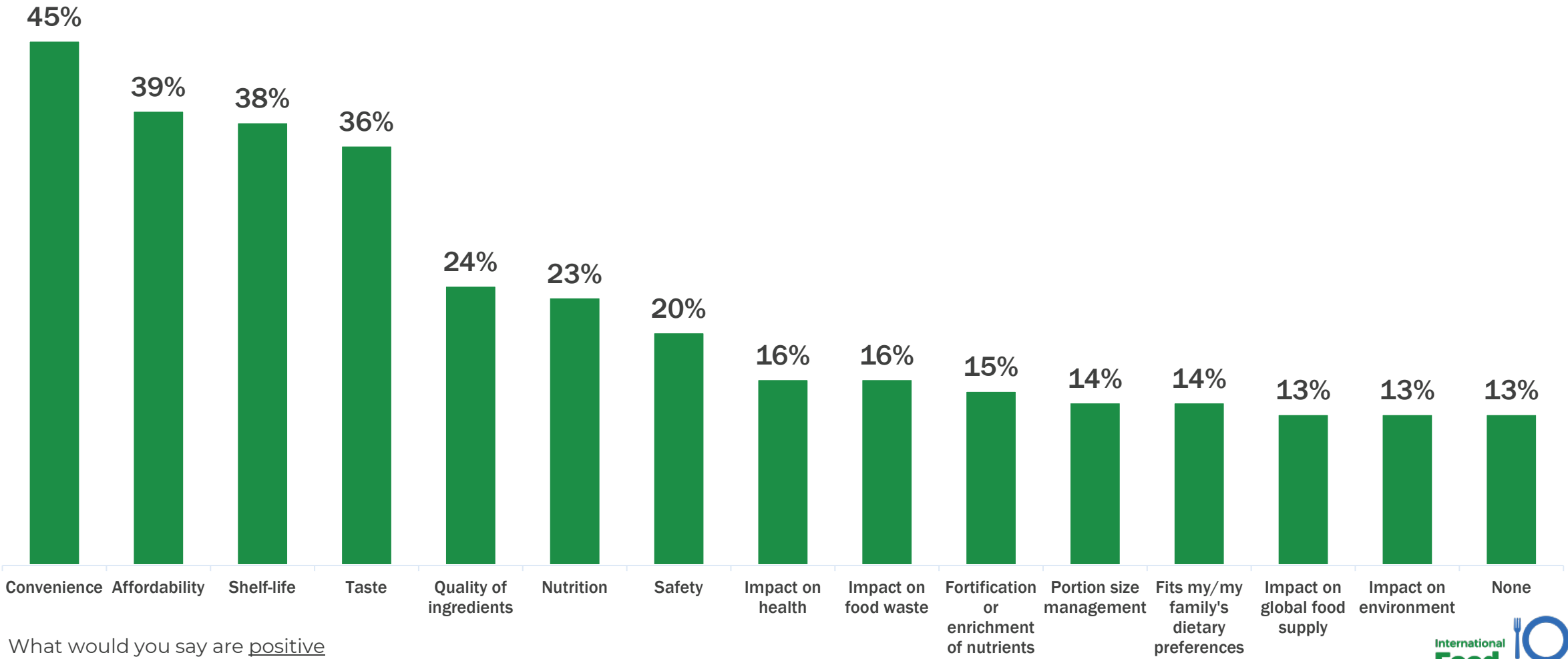
*More than 1 in 4 do not believe processed foods can be part of a healthy diet.*



**Q11.** In general, do you believe that processed foods can be part of a healthy diet?

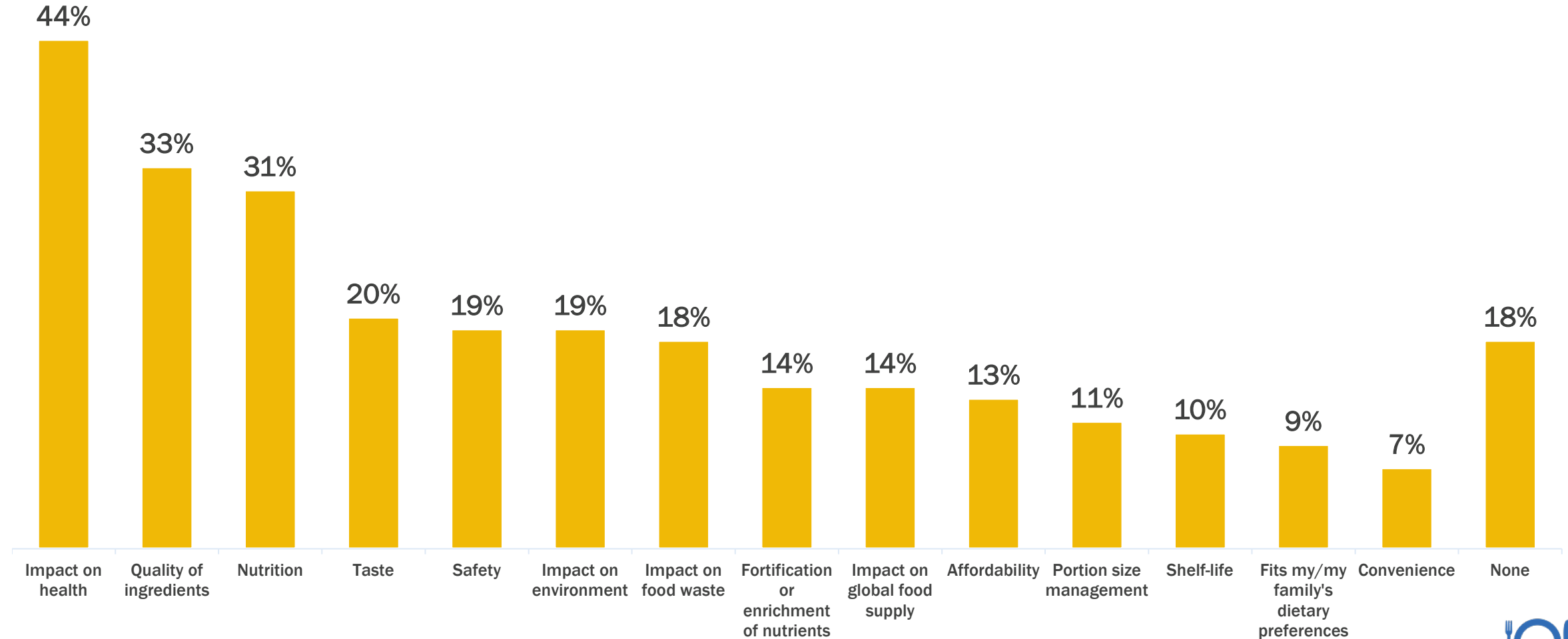
**Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: Public Perceptions of Processed Foods**

# Convenience, affordability, shelf-life and taste are viewed as the most positive aspects of processed foods.



What would you say are positive aspects of processed foods, if any?  
Select all that apply.

# Impact on health, ingredient quality and nutrition are viewed as the most negative aspects of processed food.

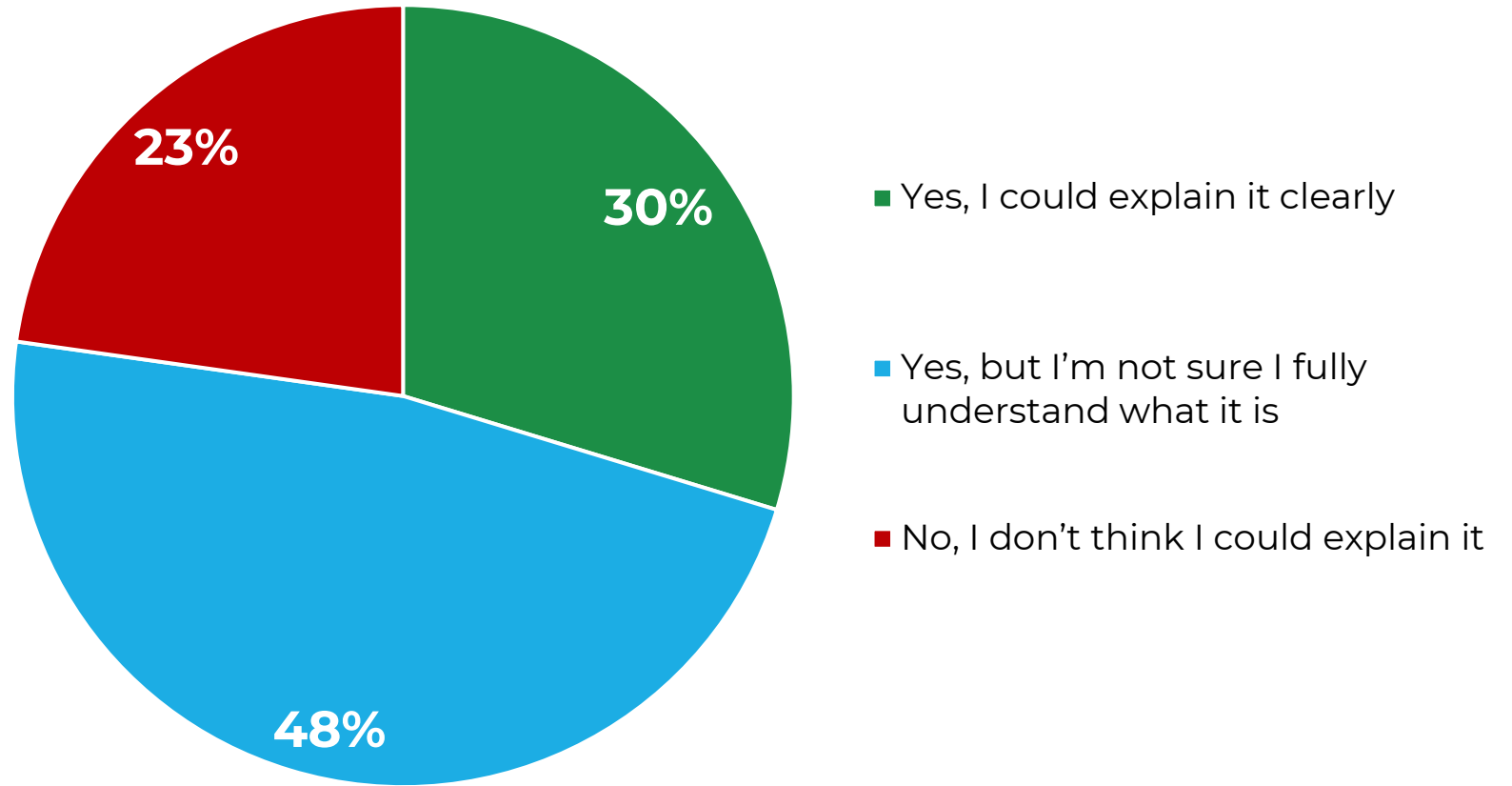


What would you say are negative aspects of processed foods, if any? Select all that apply.



# 7 in 10 are unsure if they explain what a processed food is.

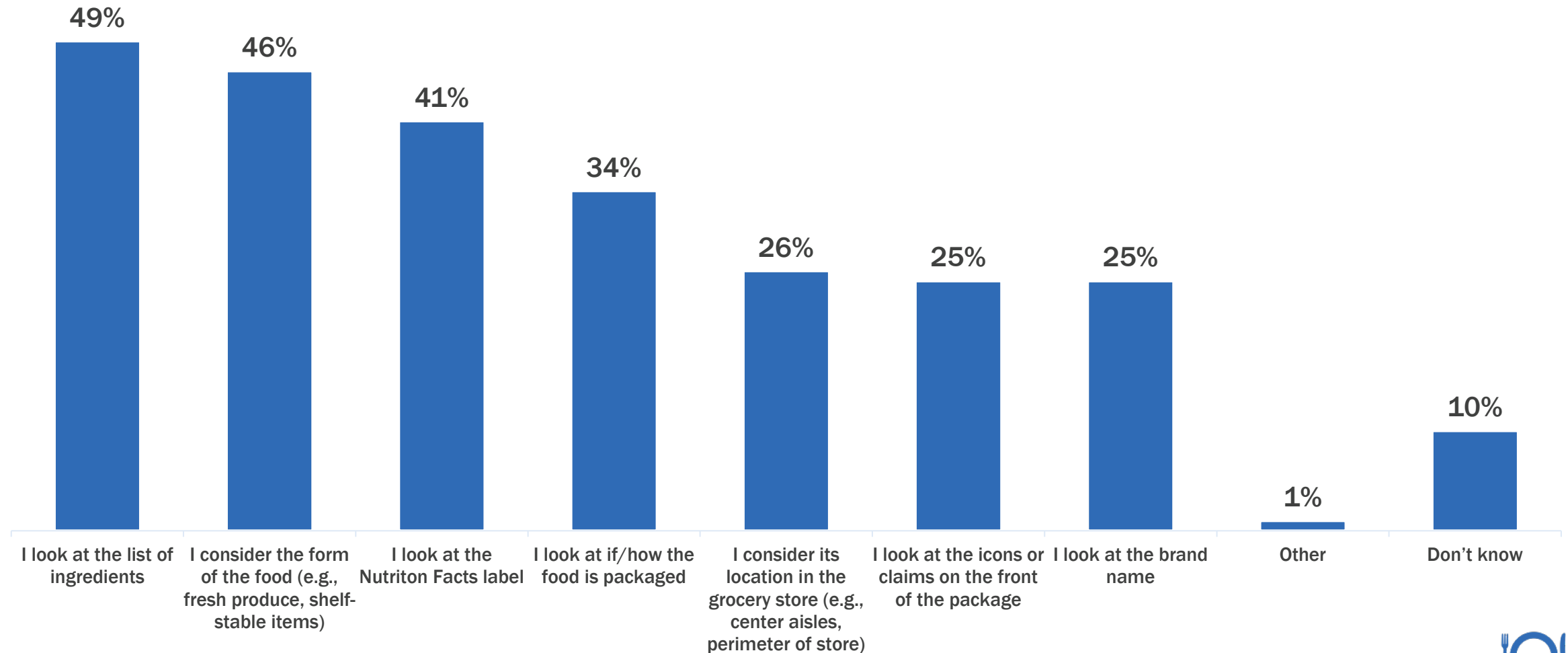
*Those with a college degree are more likely to say they could explain it clearly.*



**Q12.** Do you feel you could explain to a friend or family member what a processed food is?  
Select the best response.

**Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: Public Perceptions of Processed Foods**

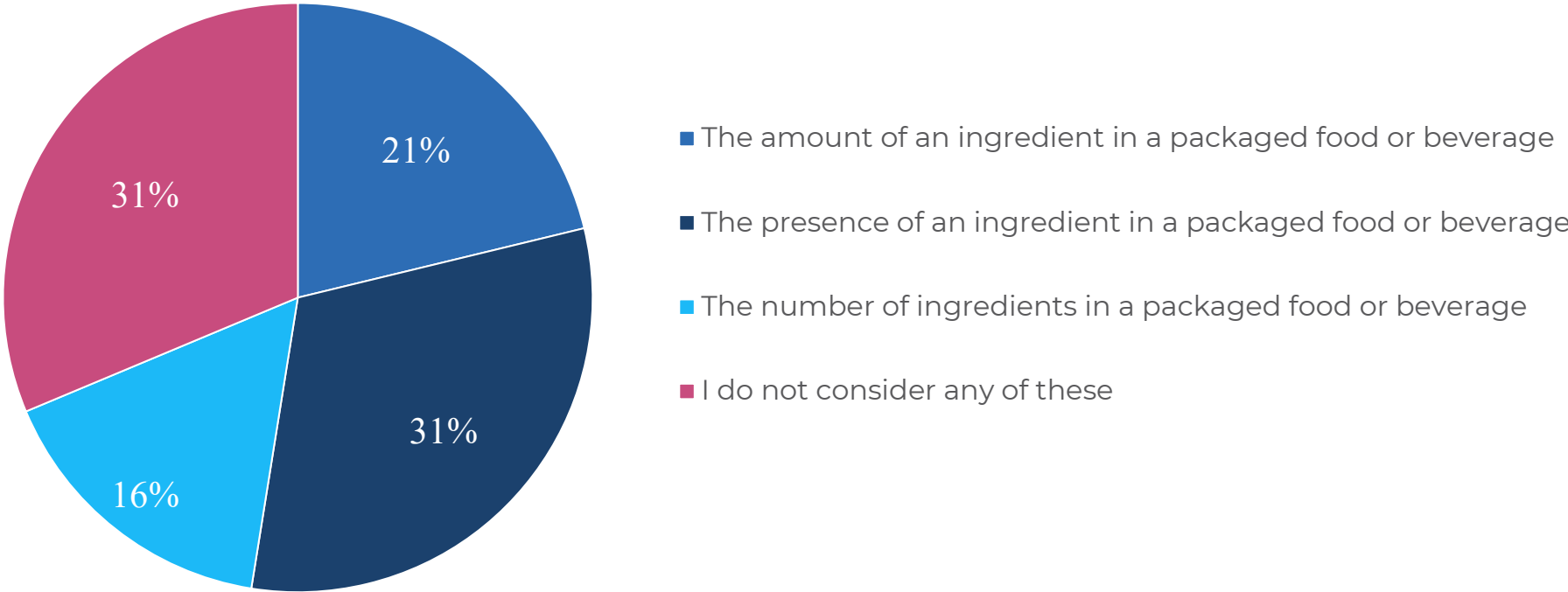
# The ingredients list is the most common reference point for deciding whether a food is processed.



How would you decide whether a food or beverage is processed?  
Select all that apply.

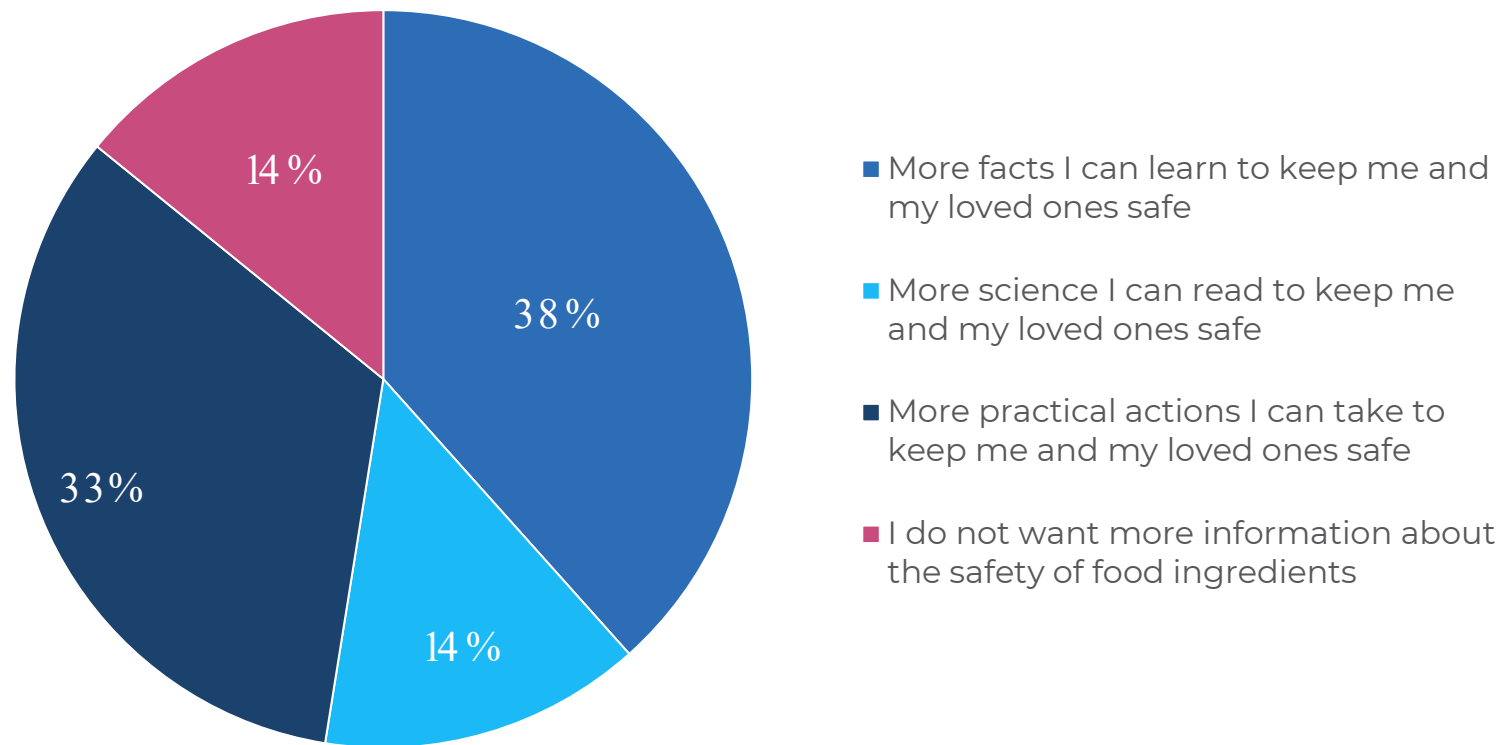
# When considering potential health risks associated with packaged food and beverages, 3 in 10 Americans do not consider the amount, presence, or number of ingredients.

More Americans consider the presence of an ingredient (31%) to be most important when considering potential health risks than the amount of an ingredient (21%) or number of ingredients (16%).



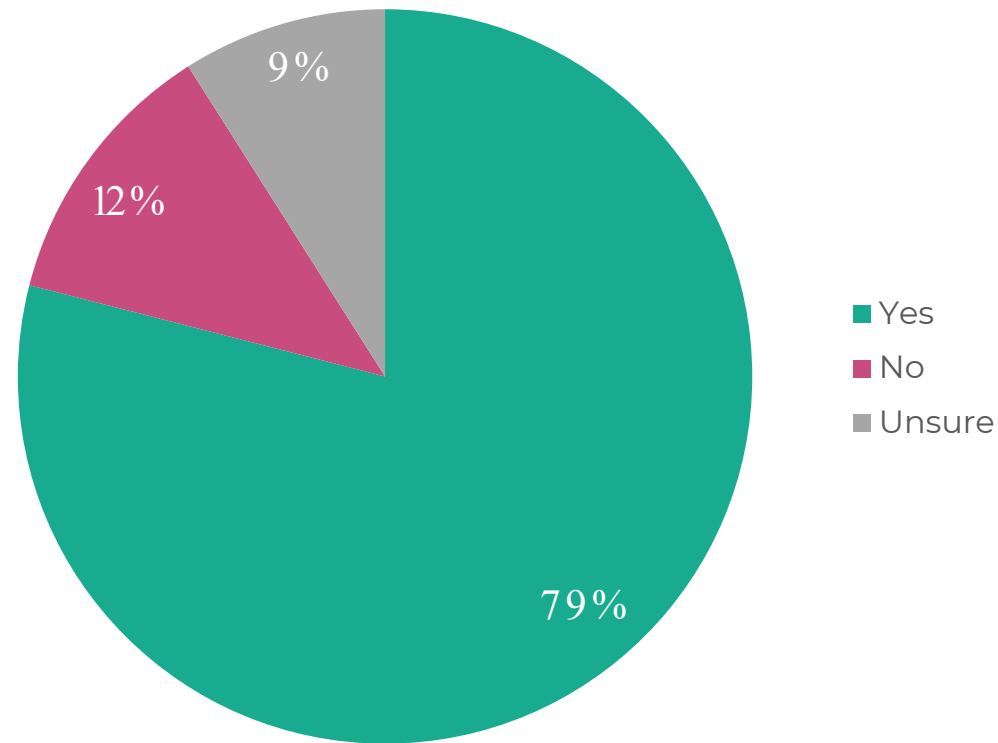
# When it comes to the type of information about the safety of food ingredients that Americans want more of, facts and practical actions are more desired than science.

One in seven (14%) do not want more information about the safety of food ingredients.



# 8 in 10 Americans say it seems like recommendations about what to eat and drink are always changing.

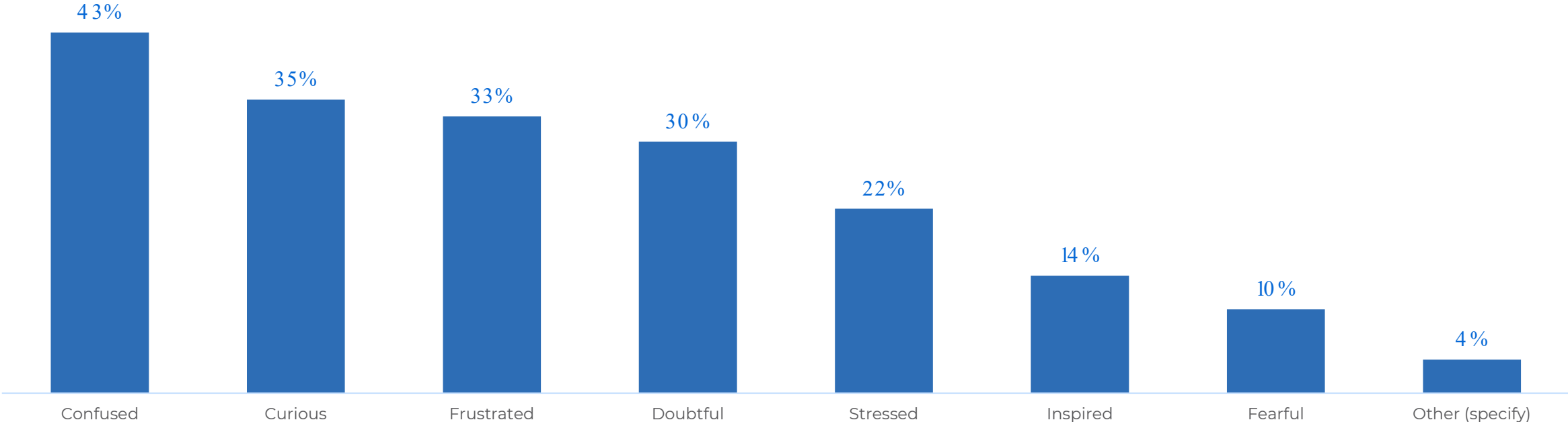
Just over 1 in 10 (12%) do not feel like food recommendations are always changing.





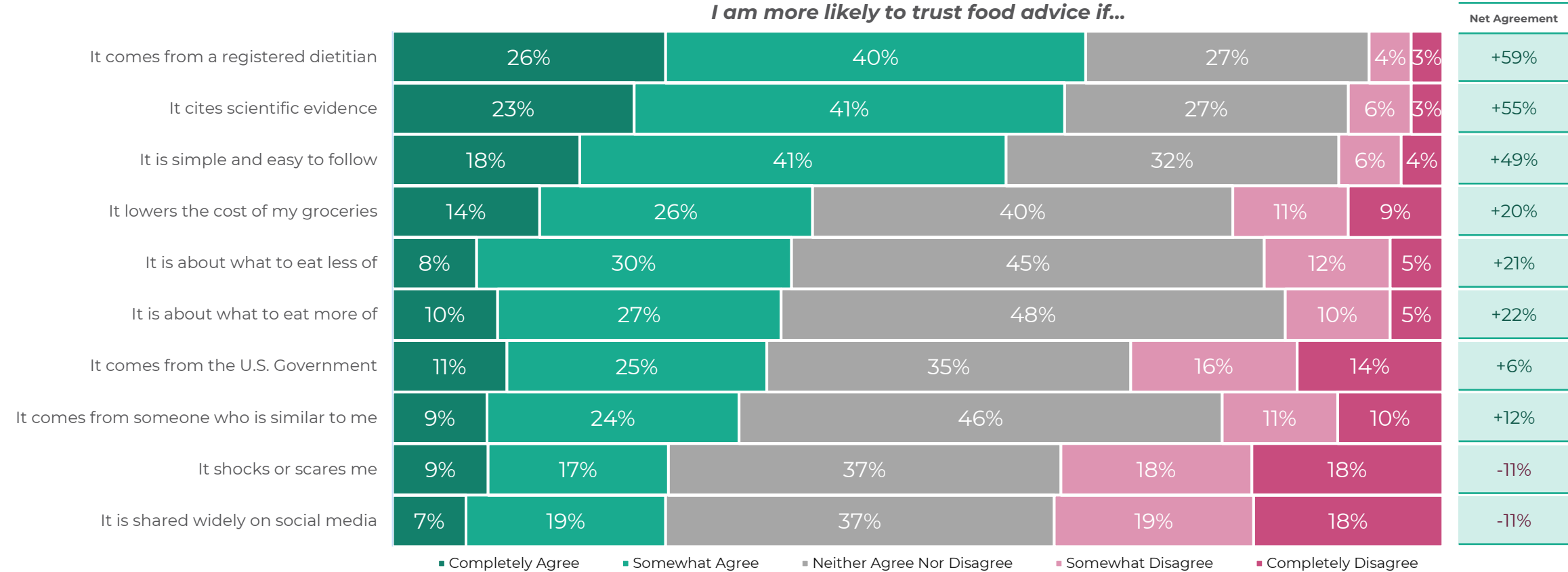
# Many feel confused, frustrated, doubtful, and/or stressed about their food choices due to the perception that dietary recommendations seem like they are always changing.

Still, approximately one-third report feeling curious (35%) and 14% feel inspired.



# Two-thirds of Americans say they are more likely to trust food advice if it comes from a registered dietitian.

Food advice is also more likely to be trusted if it cites scientific evidence and/or is simple and easy to follow. Food advice is less likely to be trusted if it shocks or scares or if it is shared widely on social media.

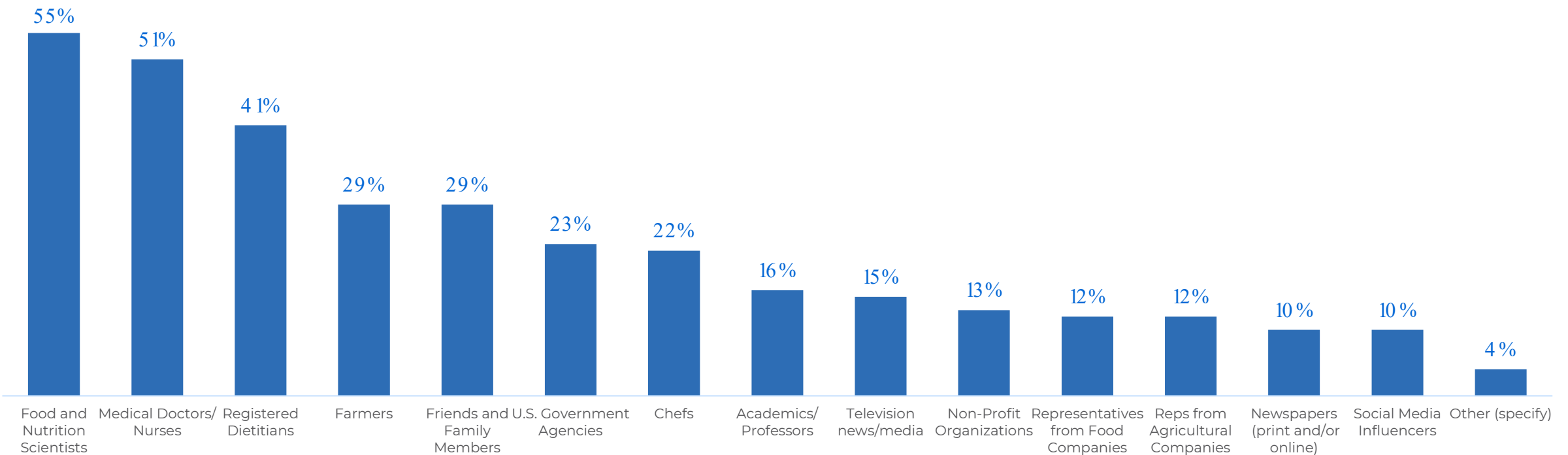


Q9. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please rate your level of agreement on a scale of 1-5. (n=1000)  
*"I am more likely to trust food advice if..."*

Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: Americans' Trust In Food & Nutrition Science

# Among potential sources of food information, the most trusted are food and nutrition scientists, medical doctors/nurses, and registered dietitians.

More Americans trust their friends and family for food information (29%) than trust government agencies (23%), television news (15%), or newspapers (10%).





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# Monthly IFIC Spotlight Surveys, Expert Webinars, Content Series

## 2024 Topics:

- **January: Processed Foods**
- **February: Low- & No-Calorie Sweeteners**
- **March: Caffeine**
- **April: Pesticides**
- **May: Dairy Consumption Trends**
- **June: IFIC Food & Health Survey**
- **July: Sodium**
- **August: Snacking**
- **September: Food Ingredient Safety**
- **October: Trust in Food & Nutrition Science**
- **November: Seed Oils**
- **December: Front-of-Pack Labeling**

**VIEW IFIC WEBINAR PORTFOLIO**  
on [ific.org](https://www.ific.org)

International Food Information Council

**Consumer Survey: Public Perceptions Of Processed Foods In A Healthy Diet**

JANUARY 2024

International Food Information Council

**IFIC Spotlight Survey: CAFFEINE**

March 2024

2024 IFIC SPOTLIGHT SURVEY

**Public Perceptions of Pesticides & Produce Consumption**

APRIL 2024

2024 IFIC SPOTLIGHT SURVEY

**American Consumer Perceptions of Sodium in the Diet**

JULY 2024

2024 IFIC SPOTLIGHT SURVEY

**American Consumer Perceptions of Snacking**

August 2024

2024 IFIC SPOTLIGHT SURVEY

**American Perceptions of Food Ingredient Safety**

September 2024

2024 IFIC SPOTLIGHT SURVEY

**Americans' Trust In Food & Nutrition Science**

October 2024







## **Understanding & Interpreting Food & Health Scientific Studies**

Guidance For Food & Nutrition Communicators

**MARCH 2024**



# **IFIC Science Communication Content Hub**

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- **Welcome & User Guide**
- **Guidance Document**
- **Shareable Graphics / Images**
- **Consumer Research**
- **Expert Webinars**
- **Additional Resources From Food Insight**
- **Third-party Organizations**
- **Related Publications & Select References**





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**THANK  
YOU**

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