

Knowledge, Understanding and Behaviors When Feeding Young Children: Insights from U.S. Parents and Caregivers

March 2021



Methodology

One thousand online interviews were conducted among adults ages 18+ from December 12-25, 2020 and were weighted to ensure proportional results. The survey followed a “least filled” approach to evenly distribute child ages in the survey, in which each respondent that reported having more than one child/child they cared for was instructed to answer questions based on one of these children.

The Bayesian confidence level for 1,000 interviews is 3.5, which is roughly equivalent to a margin of error ± 3.1 at the 95% confidence level.

An additional 199 interviews were conducted among adults 18+ through January 4, 2021 who identified as Black, African American, Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish descent to assure adequate number of respondents to support comparisons.

Statistical Significance

Something is statistically significant if the result cannot be attributed to random chance. Statistical significance in this presentation is compared within each demographic (e.g., age, race, gender, etc.). For example, if the responses from female respondents is considered to be significant, it is in relation to male respondents and not necessarily other demographic groups.

This research was supported by funding from Abbott.



A photograph of a woman with long dark hair and a young girl with blonde hair, both smiling and looking down at a cutting board. The woman is wearing a grey and white plaid shirt, and the girl is wearing a yellow shirt. They are in a kitchen setting with various vegetables like cucumbers, tomatoes, and leafy greens on the counter. A blue rectangular box is overlaid on the lower left of the image, containing the text 'Executive Summary' in white.

Executive Summary

This survey presents findings on parent and caregiver attitudes and behaviors around feeding children ages 2-10. The findings from this online survey of 1,199 American parents and caregivers ages 18 to 80 focus on:

- Knowledge and understanding of current dietary recommendations for children ages 2-10
- Behaviors associated with feeding this age group
- Sources of information when making dietary decisions
- Purchasing habits when food shopping for children
- Areas of concern parents/caregivers have when feeding this age group
- Areas in need of additional science-based information when feeding this age group

Findings are presented for respondents in the base sample (n=1000). Additional insights are provided based on how findings vary by different types of demographic groups such as by age, race, gender and income.

When comparisons are made between racial/ethnic groups, findings are presented for respondents in the base sample plus the oversample of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino/Spanish descent respondents (total n=1199).

Key Findings

Overall, parents/caregivers know there is information available on dietary recommendations for children.

Most are satisfied with the amount of information about healthy eating and nutrition available to them (69% extremely/very satisfied), and 85% feel they know enough to make informed decisions about their child's diet. Half say they know at least a fair amount about the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Parents/caregivers focus more on nutrition as their child ages.

Most have increased their focus on their child's nutritional needs as the child ages, and half indicate that their child's overall health has become better as they've aged. However, 38% agree that it is difficult to monitor their nutritional needs. Of those who agree, 83% say they would make better choices if it was easier to know their child's nutritional needs.

Parents/caregivers are confident that their child's diet addresses key health considerations.

Growth and development and the child's immune system are top considerations, and over three in 4 are confident that their child's current diet is sufficiently addressing both priorities.

However, they recognize opportunities for improvement.

Two out of 5 parents/caregivers wish they could improve their child's willingness to try new foods, increase the variety of food they eat and increase the amount of vegetables consumed. However, they cite obstacles including pickiness of child and the cost and taste of healthy foods.

Key Findings

Dietary supplements are commonly used and viewed as important to support child nutrition.

More than three out of 4 parents/caregivers think that supplements are extremely/very important. Seventy-seven percent give their child at least one supplement, such as a multivitamin, single vitamin and/or mineral and/or nutritional supplement drink. Half of those who give their child supplements think they're important for growth and development and to fill nutrition gaps.

Trying to limit or avoid sugar in their child's diet is extremely common, but there is a disconnect between aspiration and behavior.

Eighty-eight percent say they try to limit or avoid sugar in their child's diet. At the same time, three in 4 regularly give their child juice and over 90% say their child eats sweets at least once a day.

Parents/caregivers pay attention to food and beverage labels when shopping.

More than half say they always/often look at product labels, including the Nutrition Facts label, ingredients list, front-of-pack icons and serving size information.

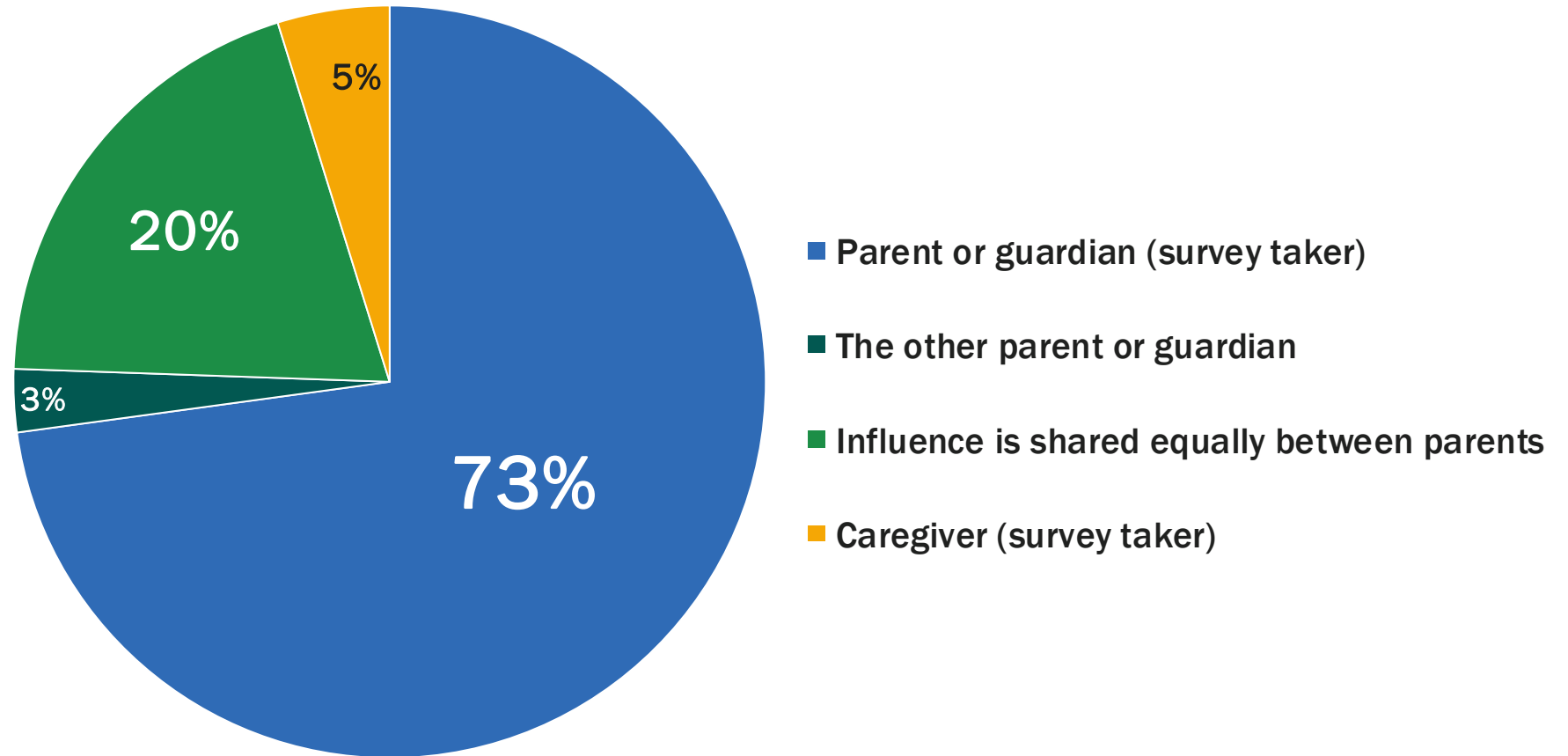
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on nutrition and eating habits of children is varied.

More than half say there has been no change in their child's nutrition or eating habits due to the pandemic. Three in 10 say their child's nutrition has improved, due in part to eating healthier, having homemade meals and monitoring the child's food options and intake. However, one in 10 say their child's nutrition has worsened during the pandemic, due in part to snacking, having a limited variety of food and eating convenient, unhealthy foods.

Decision Makers and Nutrition Guidance for Children

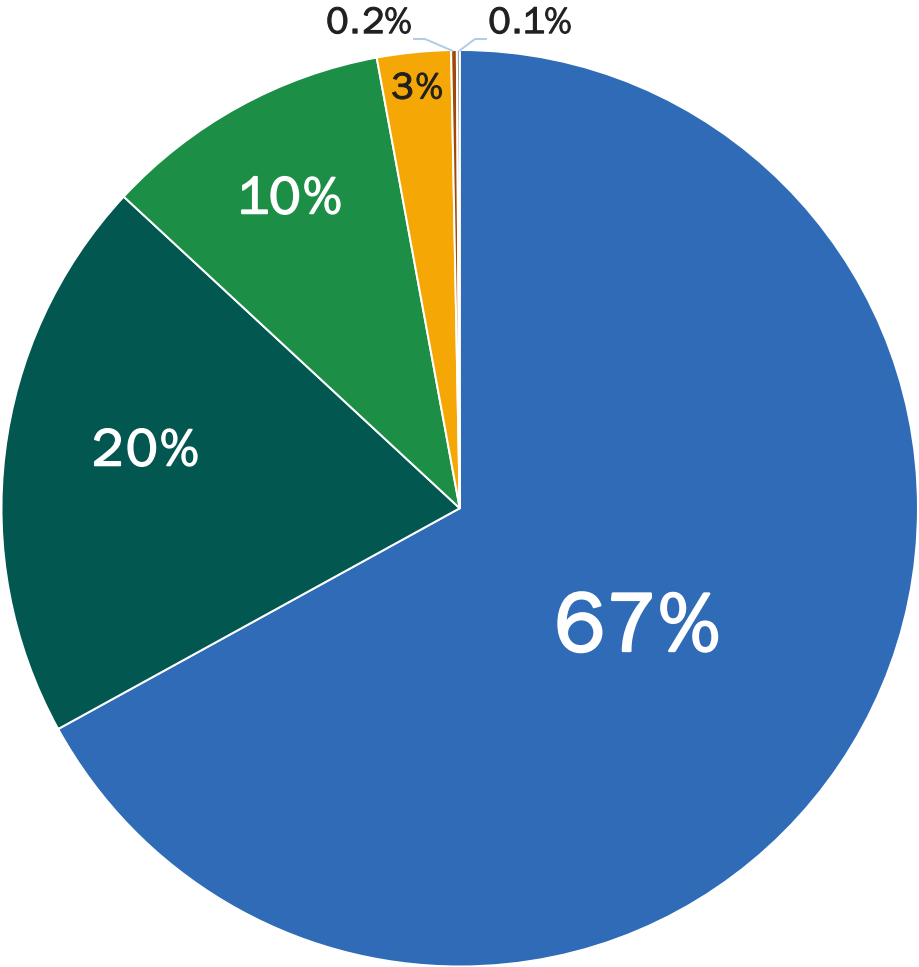


Nearly three in 4 parents/caregivers identify themselves as the main decision makers for their child's nutrition

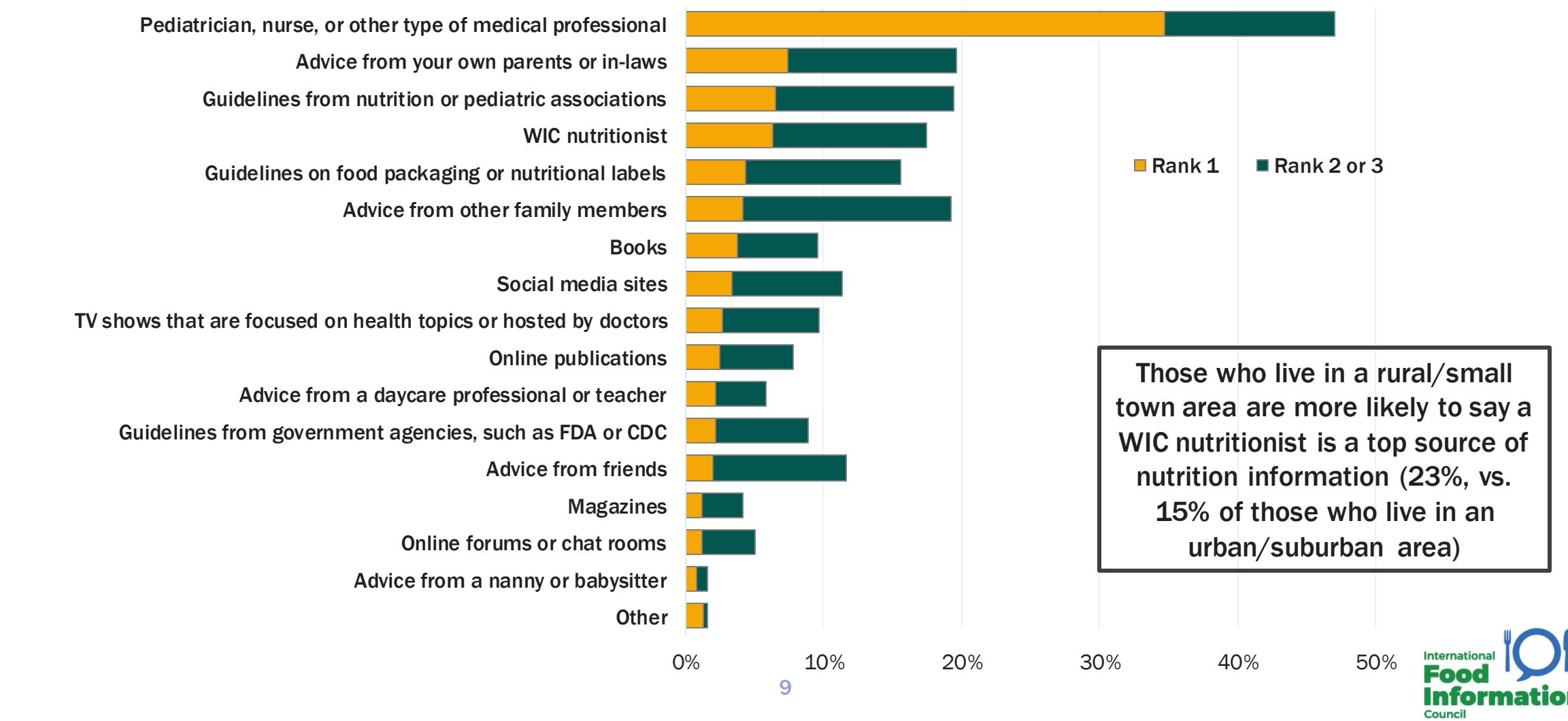


Two out of three parents/caregivers do *all* of the grocery shopping

- All of it
- Most of it
- Grocery shopping is equally split/shared with others
- Some of it
- None of it
- Not sure

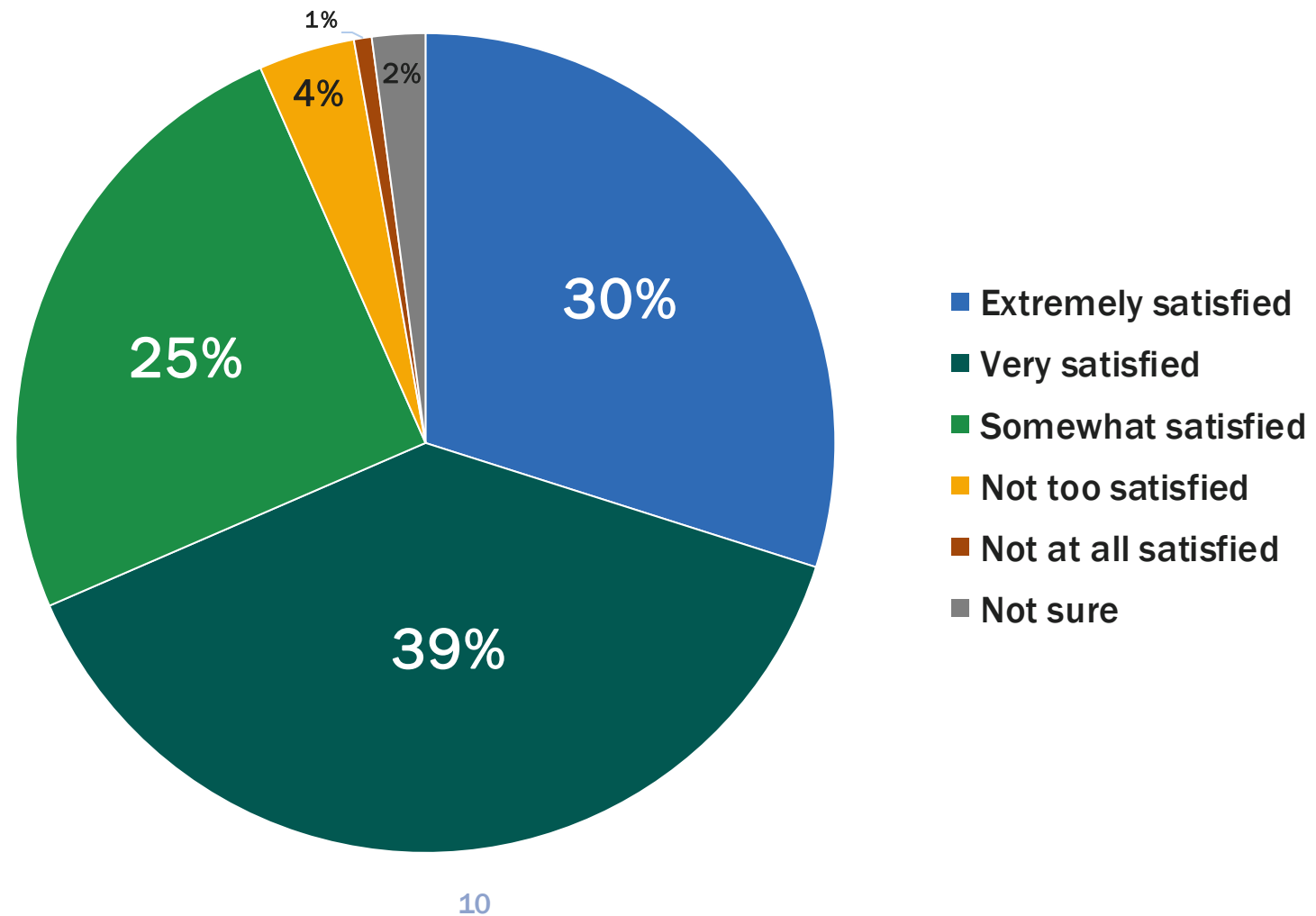


Nearly half rank medical professionals as one of the most influential sources of nutrition information for their child

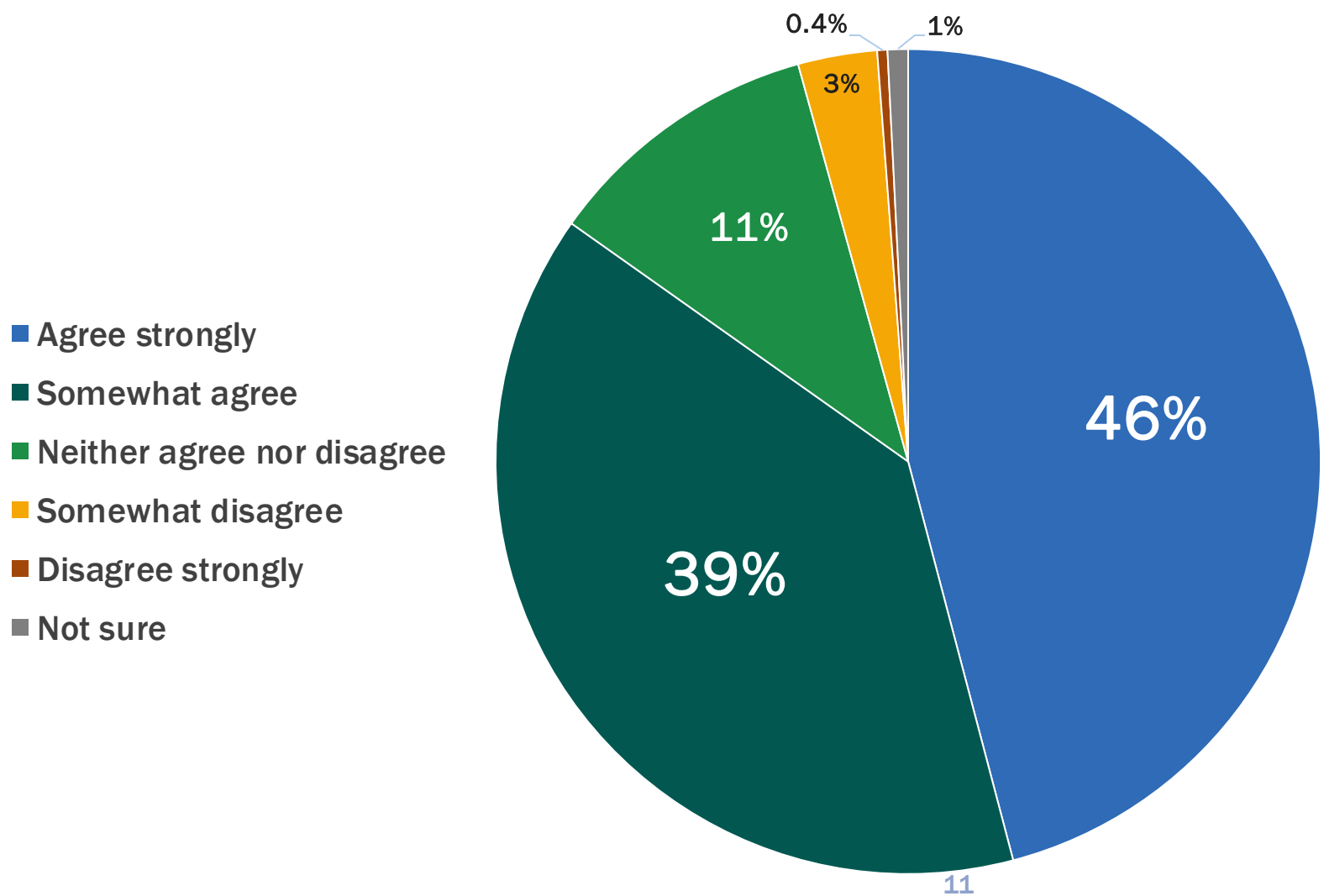


Q5: Of the following that you mentioned, please rank the top 3 most influential sources of information about nutrition for your child or the child you care for. n = 1,000

More than two out of 3 parents/caregivers are extremely or very satisfied with the amount of information and guidance available regarding healthy eating and nutrition for children



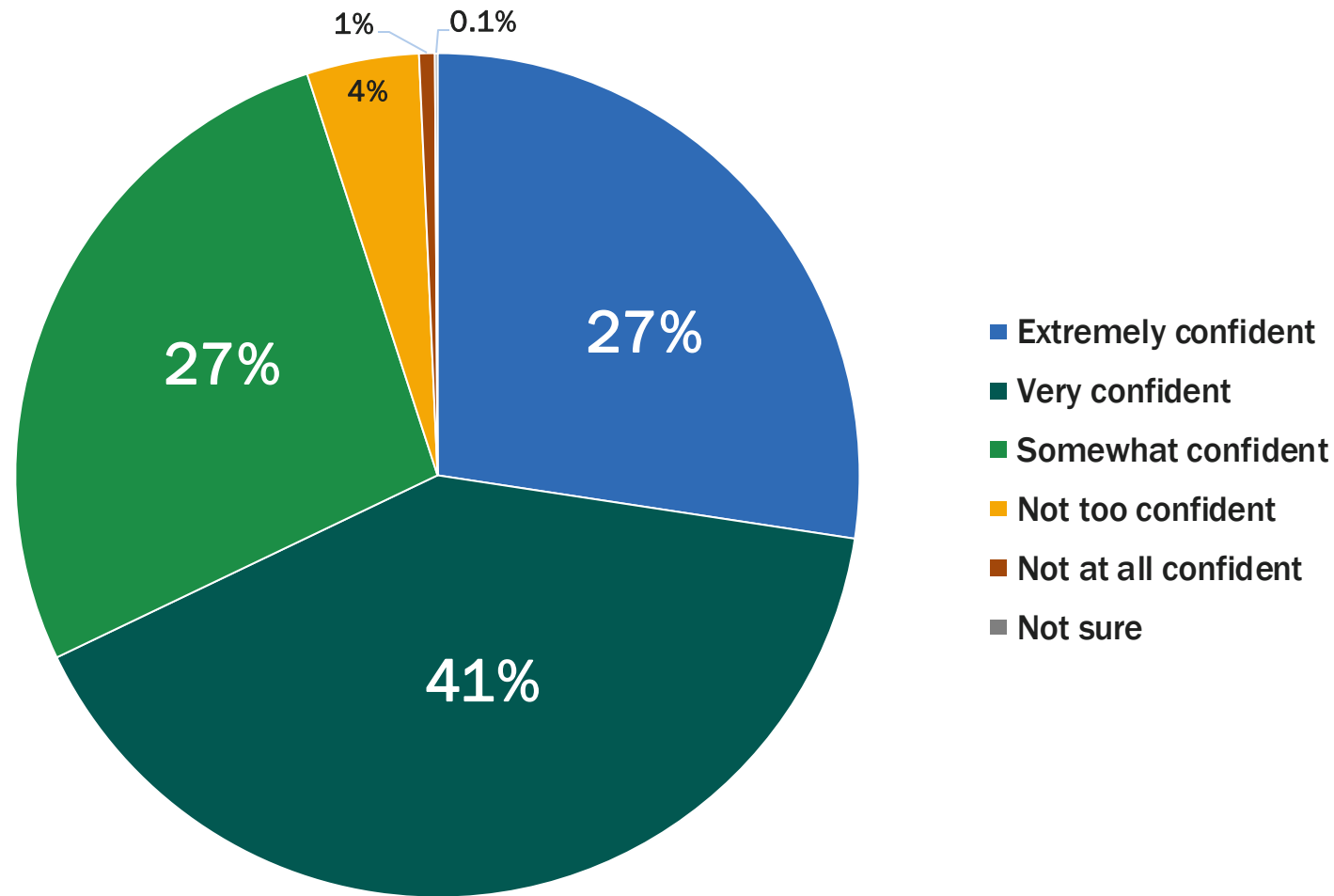
Most agree that they know enough about their children's nutritional needs to make informed decisions



87% of parents/caregivers age 30+ agree that they know enough to make informed decisions about their child's nutrition (vs. 77% of those under the age of 30)

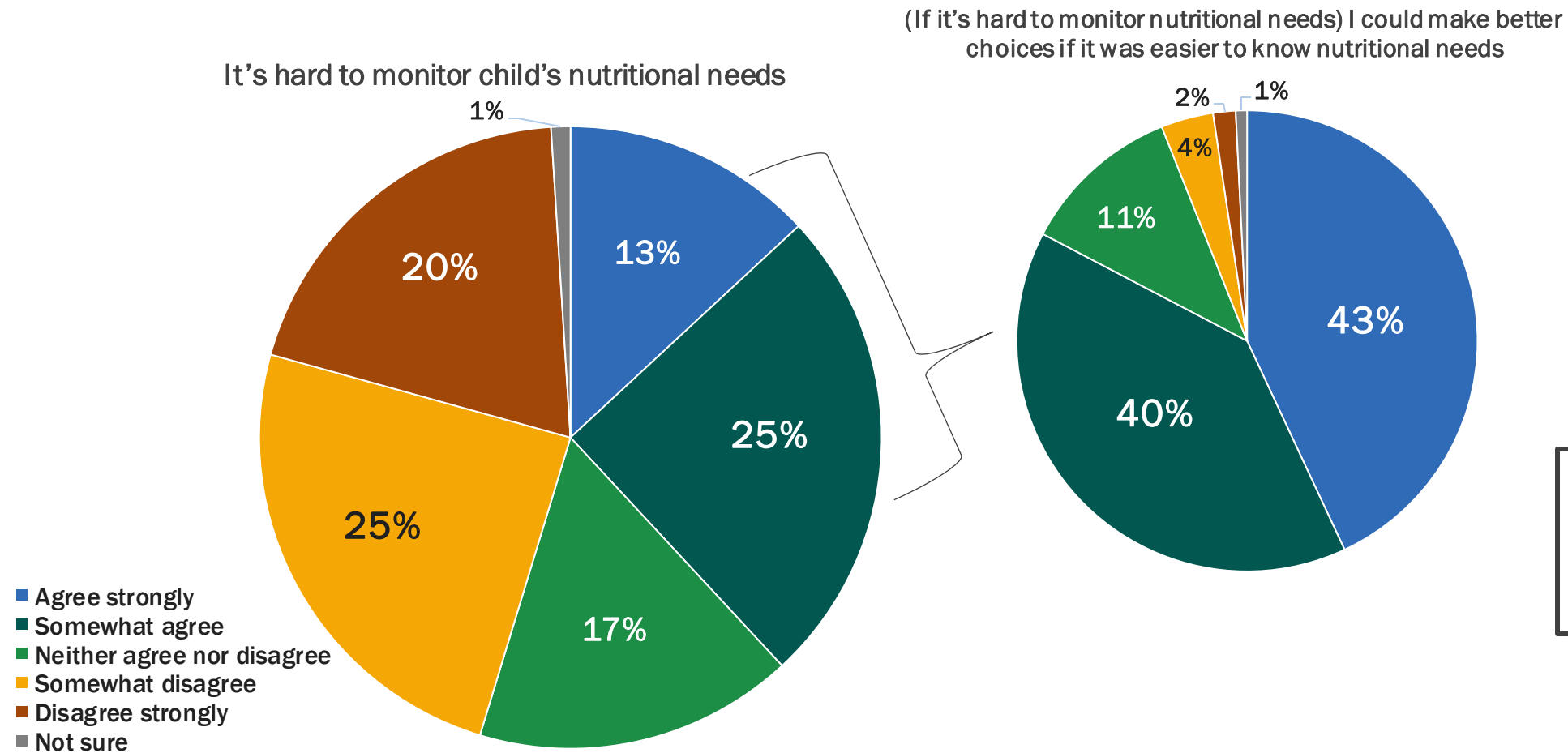
88% of consumers with a college degree agree that they know enough to make informed decisions about their child's nutrition (vs. 81% without a college degree)

Most parents/caregivers are confident that their child is getting the nutrition they need for growth and development



Nearly two out of 5 find it hard to keep track of their child's nutritional needs

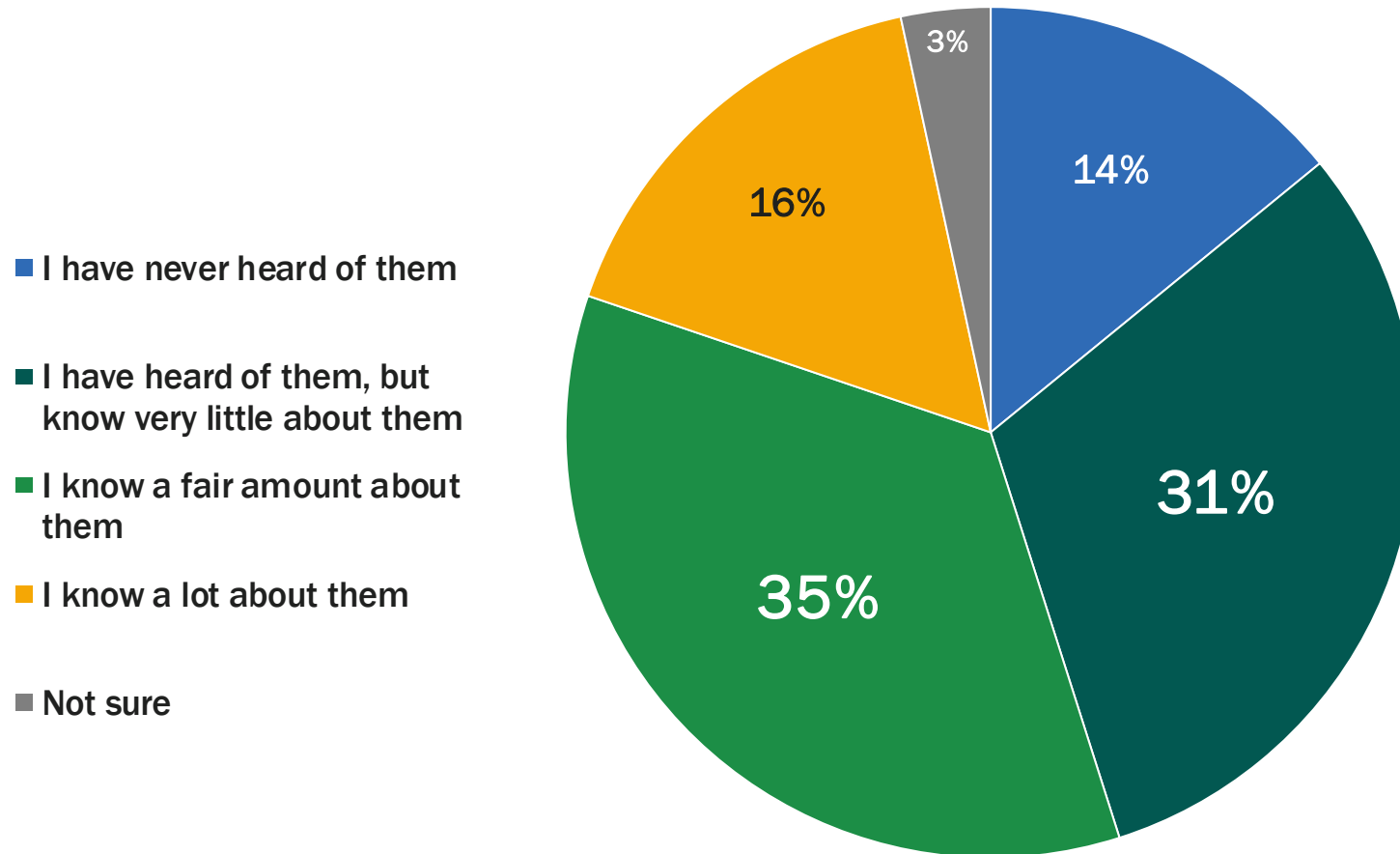
Of those who find it difficult, over 8 in 10 say they could make better choices if it was easier to know



47% of men say that it's hard to monitor their child's nutritional needs (vs. 35% of women)

Q8: It is hard for me to monitor/keep track of all the nutritional needs of my child or the child that I care for. n = 1,000
Q9: If it was easier to know the nutritional needs of my child or the child that I can for, I feel like I could make better choices for them. [If agree strongly or somewhat agree with Q8] n = 381

Half say they know at least a fair amount about the Dietary Guidelines for Americans

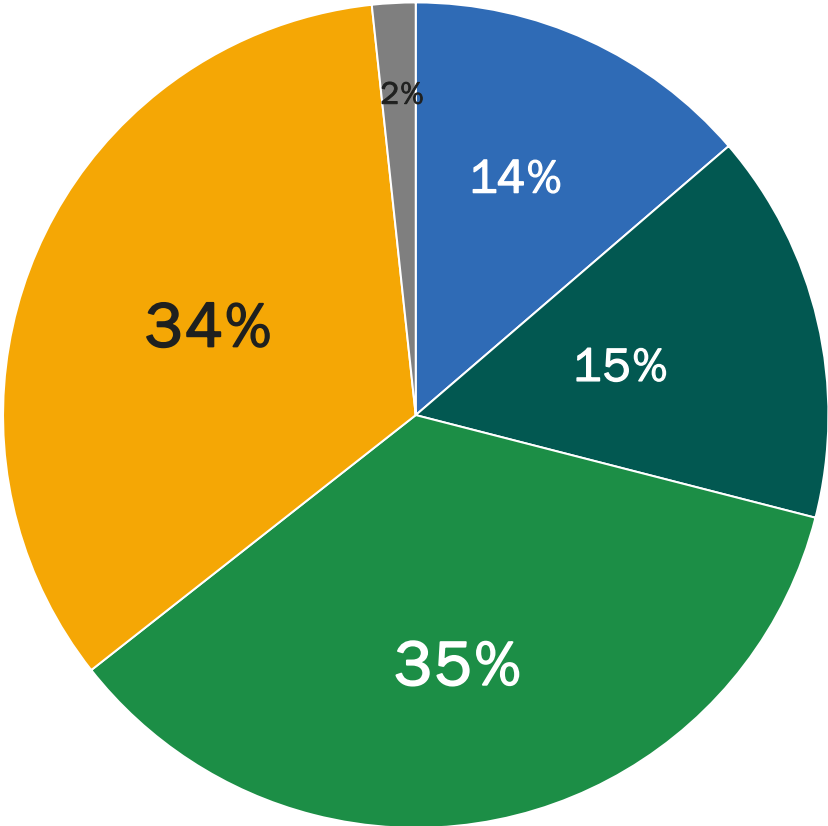


23% of men indicated that they know a lot about the guidelines (vs. 14% of women)

19% of Black/African American parents/caregivers know a lot about the guidelines (vs. 10% of Hispanics)

25% with an income over \$100K know a lot about the guidelines (vs. 17% with an income between \$50K-\$100K and 12% with an income under \$50K)

Nearly seven in 10 say they know at least a fair amount about MyPlate



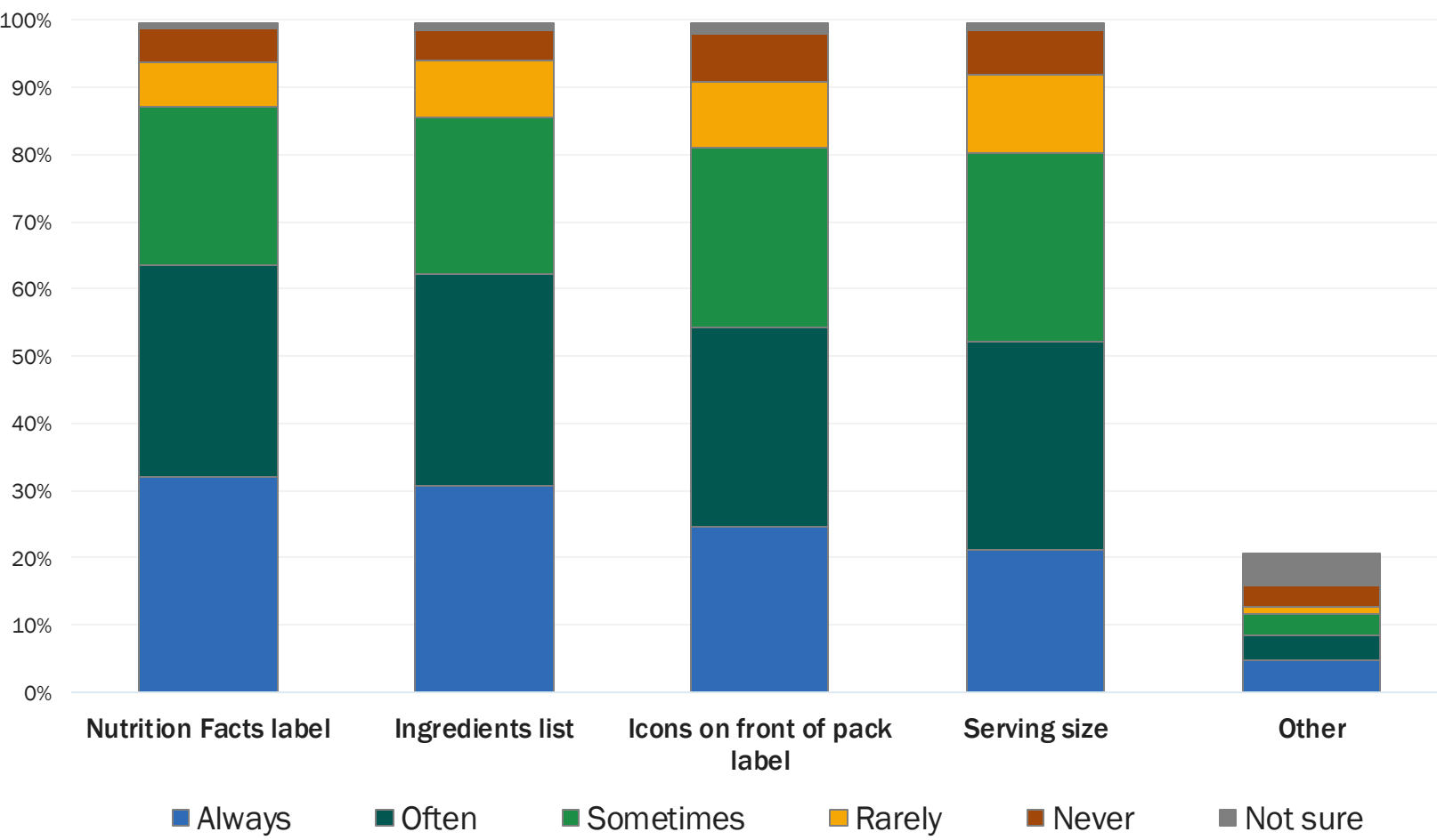
- I have never seen it before
- I have seen it, but know very little about it
- I have seen it and know a fair amount about it
- I have seen it and know a lot about it
- Not sure

SNAP and/or WIC recipients are more likely to say they know a lot about MyPlate (39%, vs. 31% of those who do not utilize a food assistance program)

40% of parents/caregivers younger than 30 know a lot about MyPlate (vs. 29% 40 or older)

47% of Black/African American parents/caregivers know a lot about MyPlate (vs. 34% of Hispanics and 32% of white non-Hispanics)

Roughly one in 3 always look at the Nutrition Facts label



More men and those with incomes >\$100K/year always or often look at labels vs. women and those making <\$100K/year

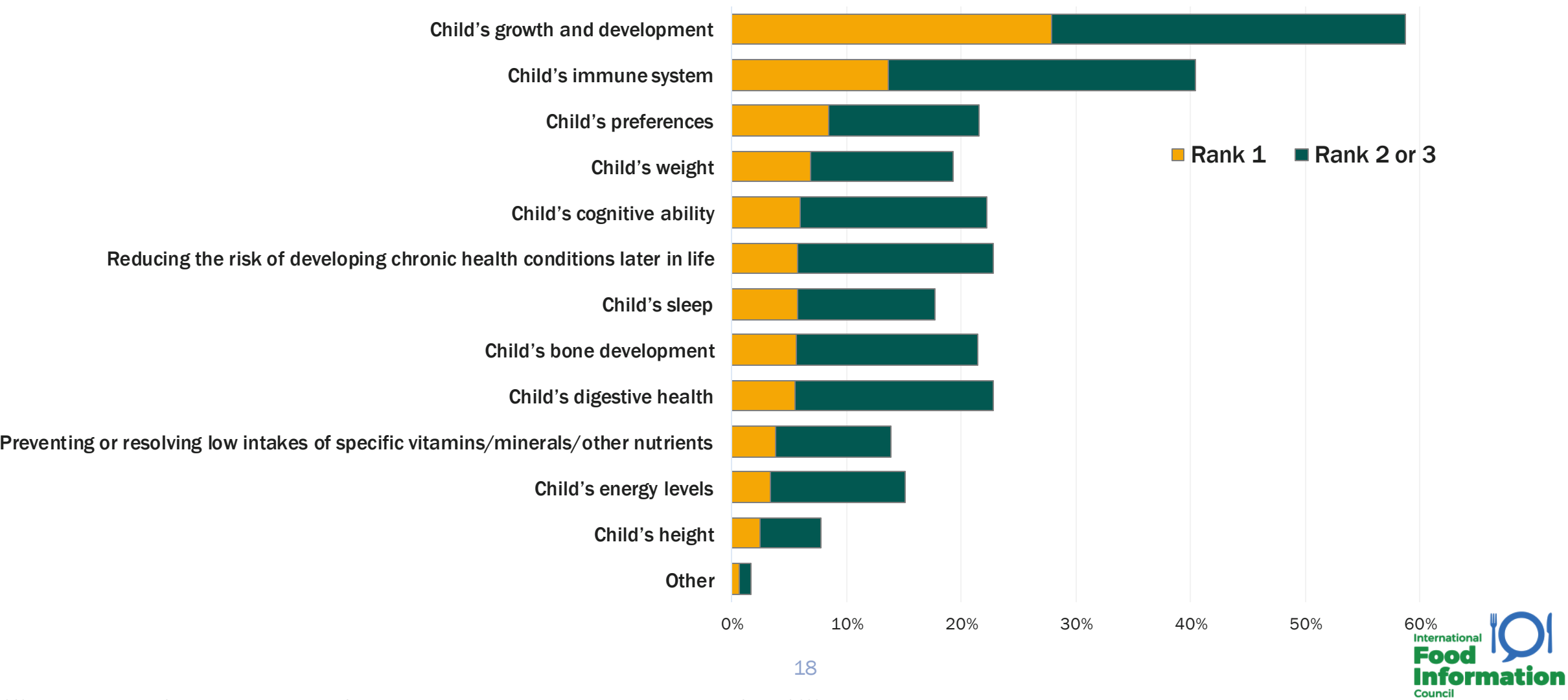
A lower rate of Hispanic parents/caregivers always/often look at icons (47% vs. 60% of Black/African Americans)

More parents/caregivers 30 or older always/often look at the ingredient list (64% for 30-39-year-olds, 66% for 40+) than those younger than 30 (54%)

Considerations and Obstacles

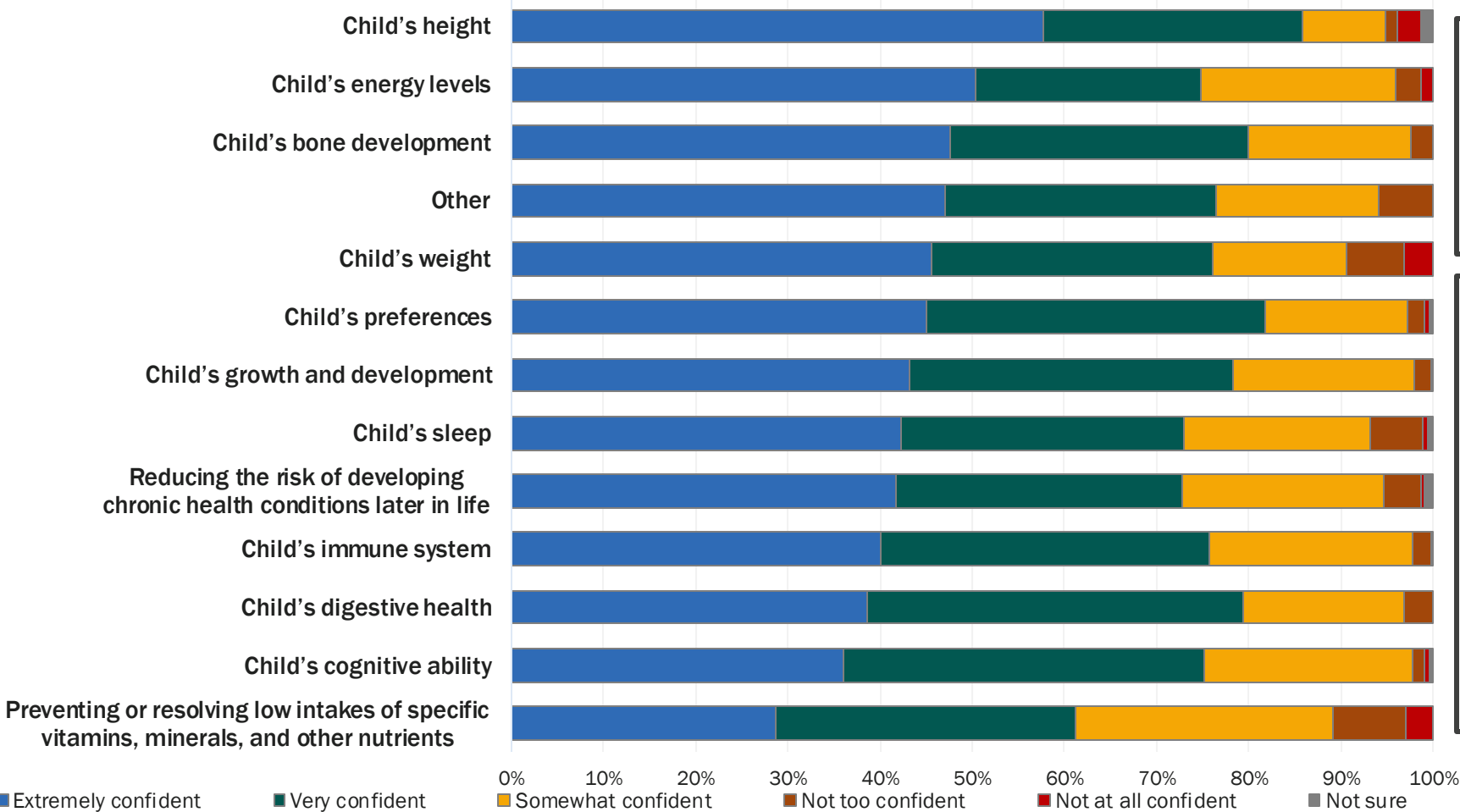


Growth and development and child's immune system are top food and beverage considerations



Q13: Please rank your top 3 when making choices about foods and beverages to give to your child or the child that you care for. n = 1,000

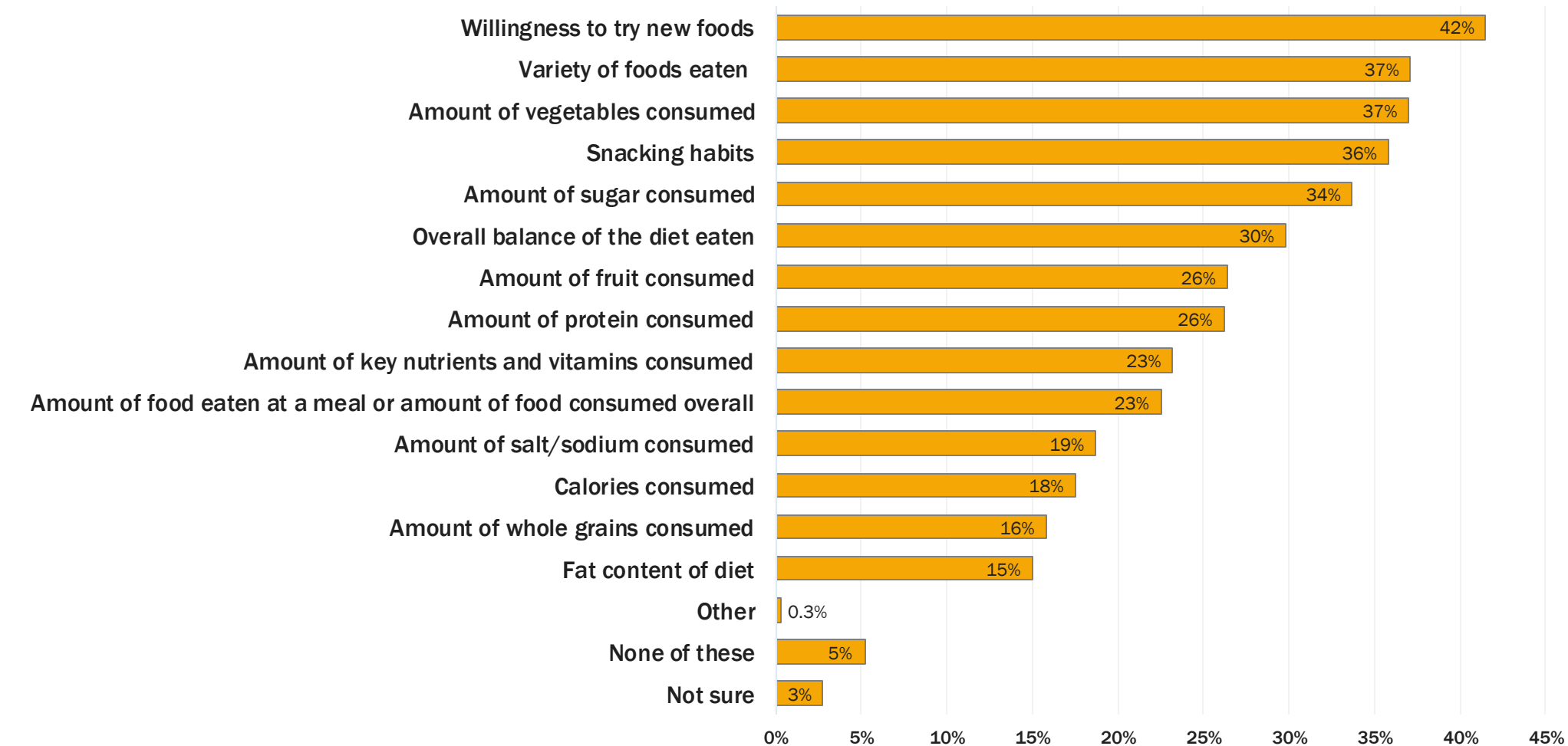
Most consumers are extremely or very confident that their child's current diet is sufficiently addressing their top priorities



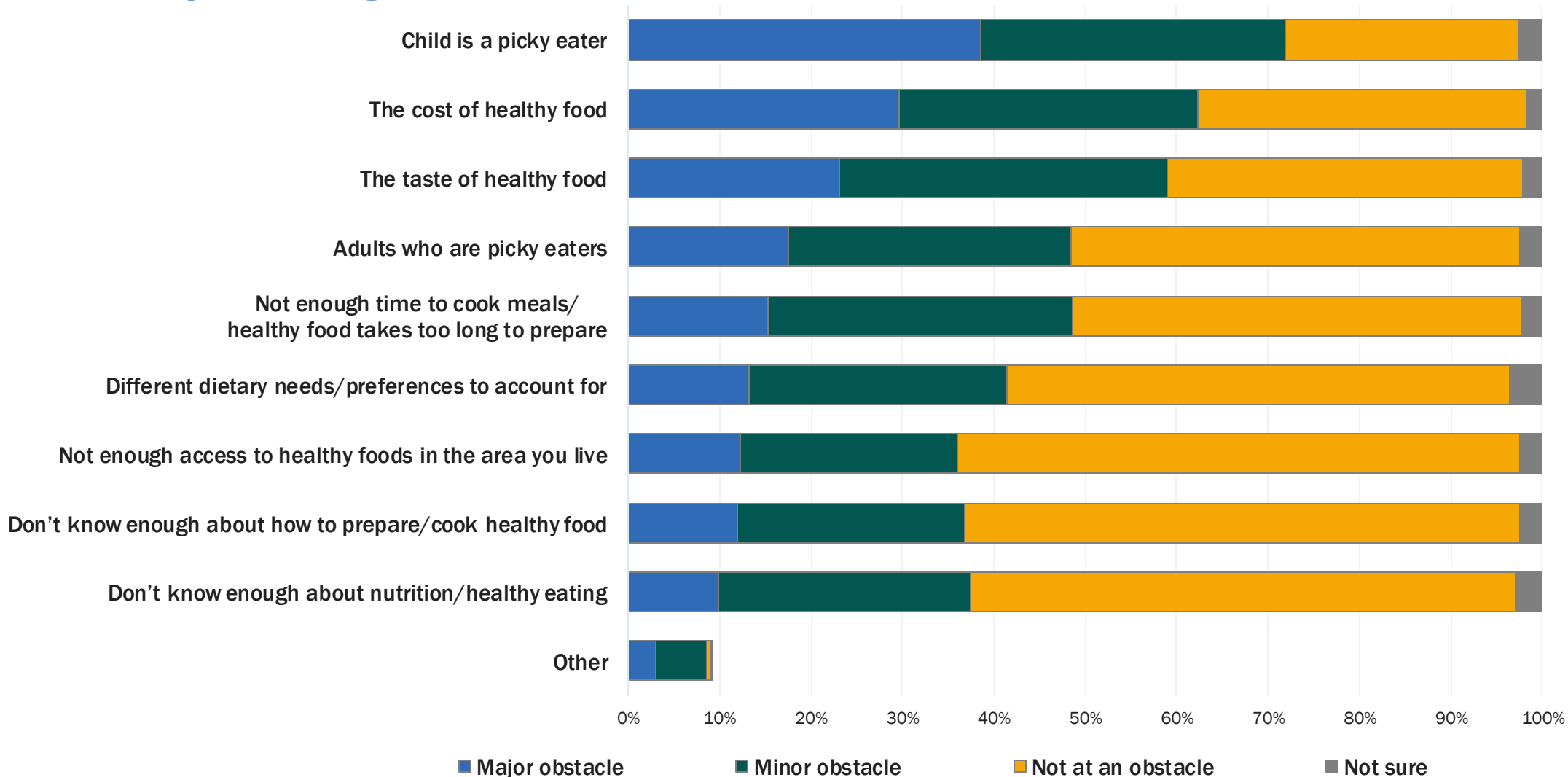
More men are extremely or very confident that their child's diet is sufficiently addressing growth and development (84% vs. 76% of women)

More SNAP and/or WIC recipients are extremely or very confident that their child's diet is sufficiently addressing growth and development (85%), and their immune system (82), compared to 74% and 72%, respectively, for those not utilizing food assistance programs

Nearly half say they wish their child was willing to try new foods



Picky eating, cost and taste of healthy foods are top obstacles to healthy eating in a household

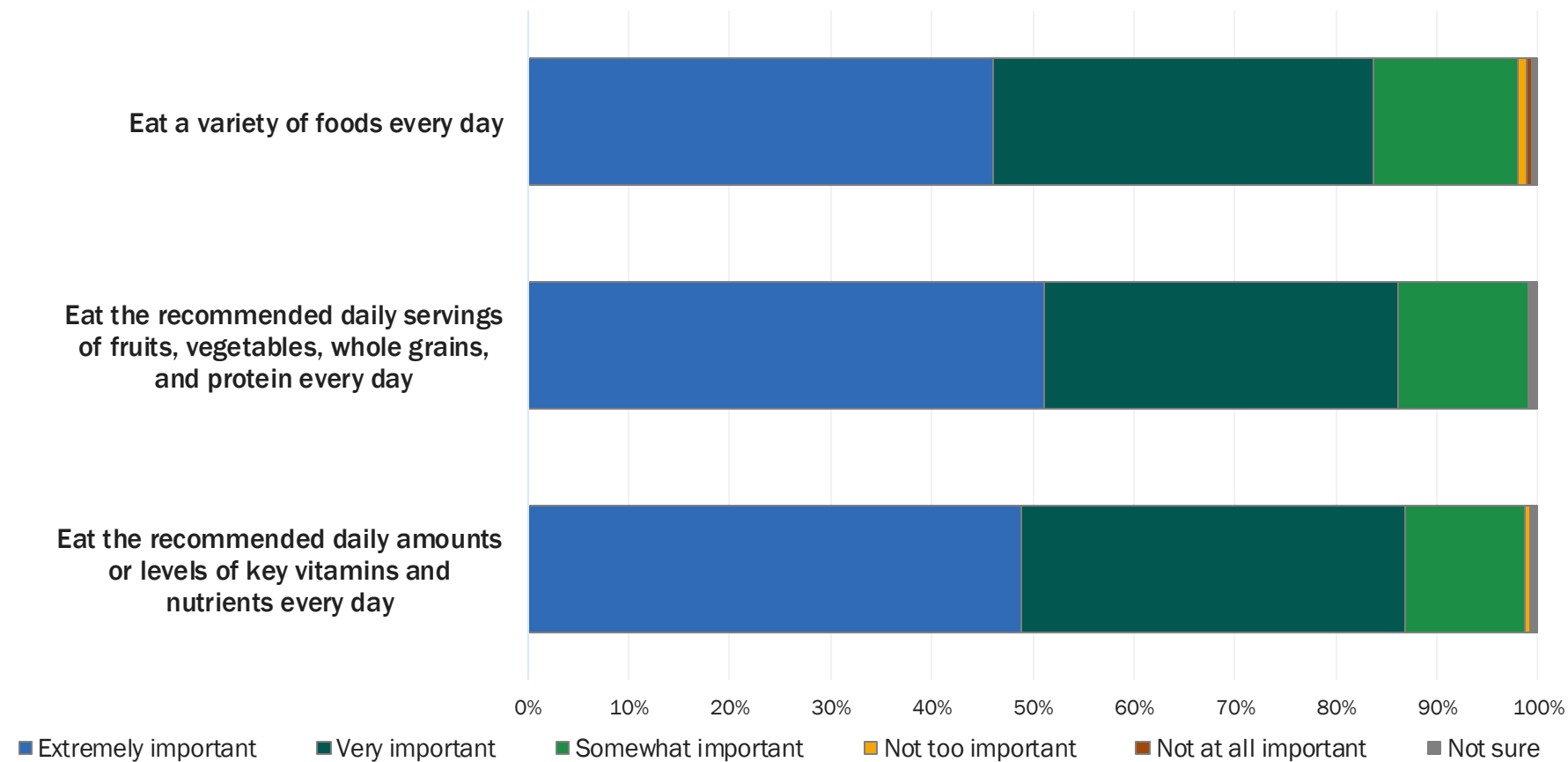


Nutrition and Food Priorities



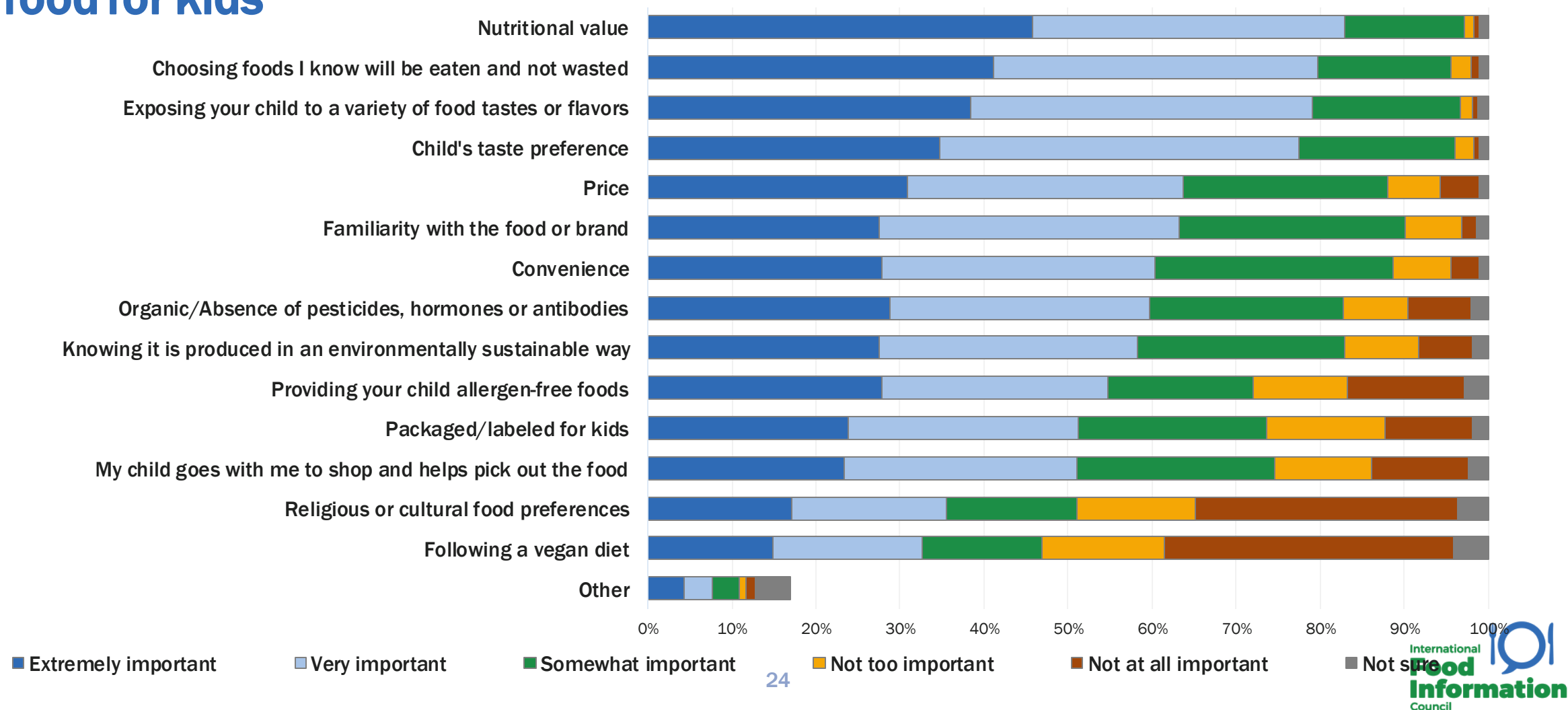
Most consumers feel that it is extremely/very important for their child to eat a variety of foods, including the recommended daily servings of food groups as well as key vitamins and nutrients

How important is it to you that your child or the child you care for:

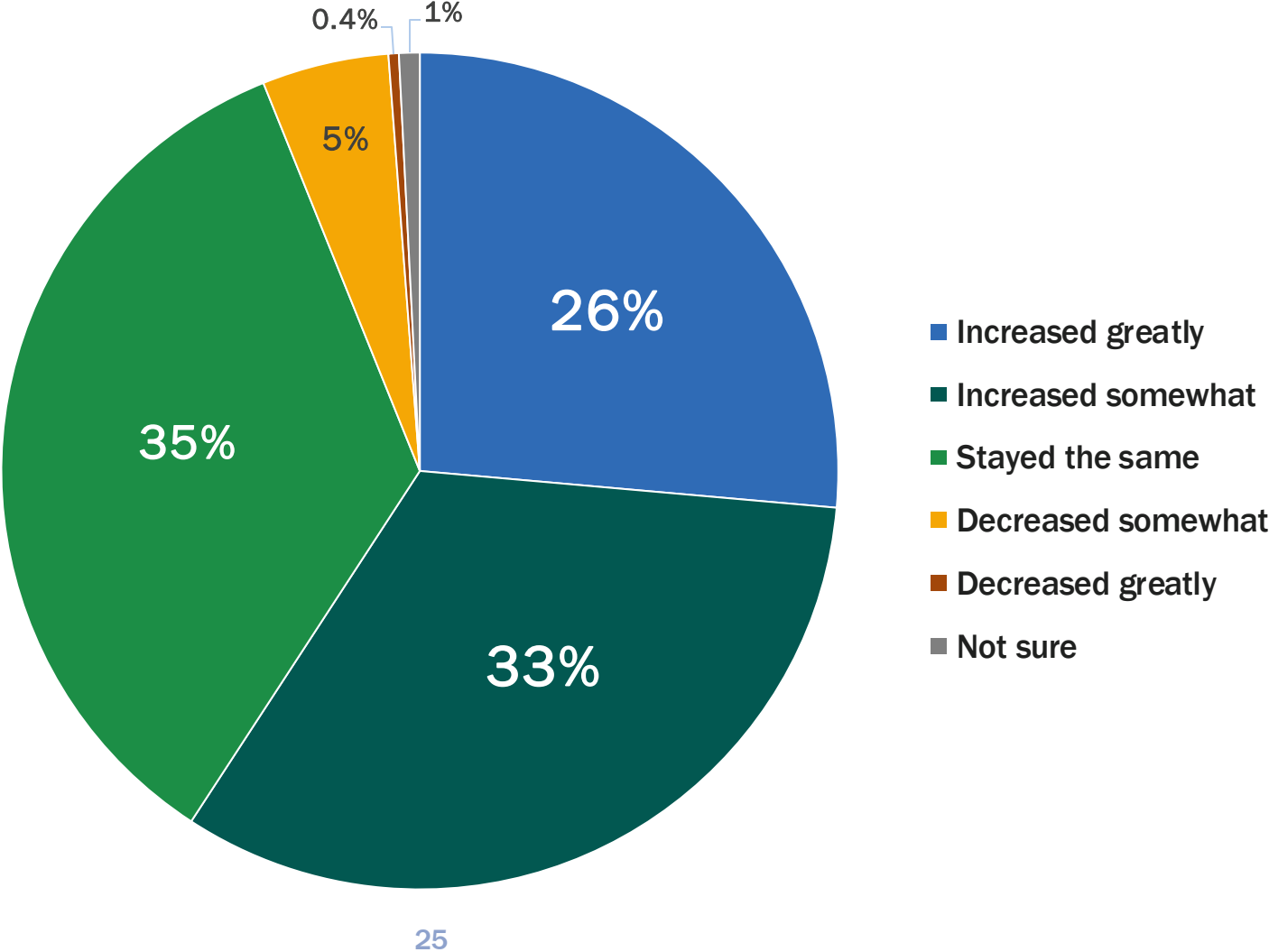


More SNAP and/or WIC recipients indicated it was extremely/very important that their child eats the recommended daily servings of fruits/etc. (90%) and key vitamins and nutrients (90%) vs. those who do not use food assistance programs (84% and 85%, respectively)

Nutritional value, choosing foods that will be eaten and exposing to a variety of tastes/flavors are top three factors when making choices about food for kids

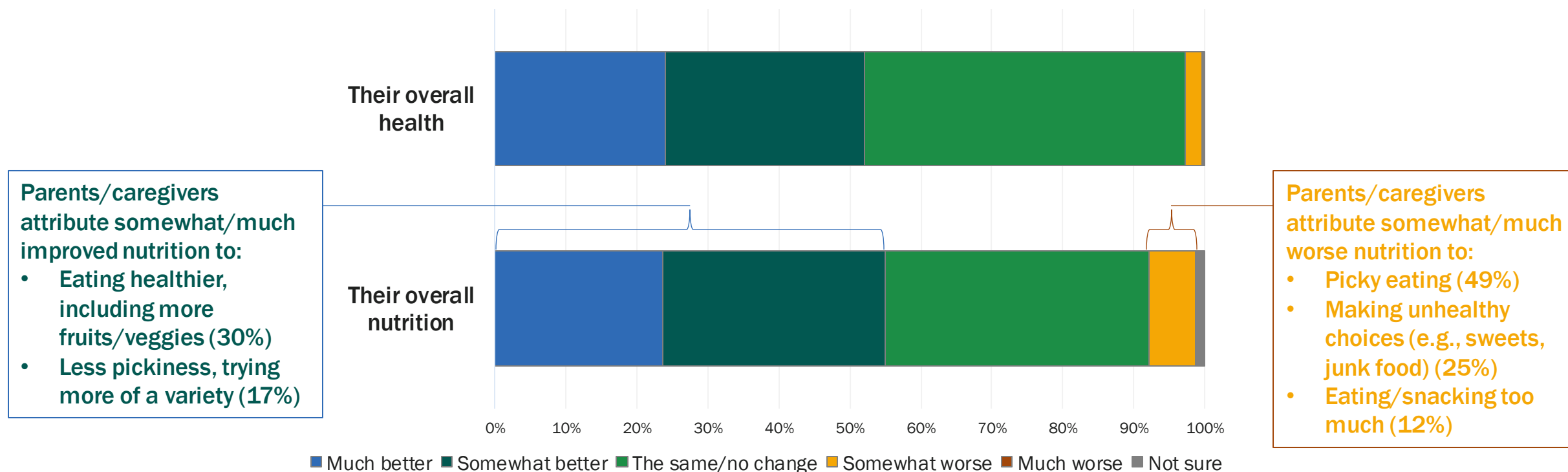


More than half of parents/caregivers focus more on child's nutritional needs as child ages



More men (66% compared to 56% of women) and SNAP and/or WIC recipients (63% compared to 57% no food assistance program) indicated that their focus on their child's nutritional needs has increased somewhat/greatly

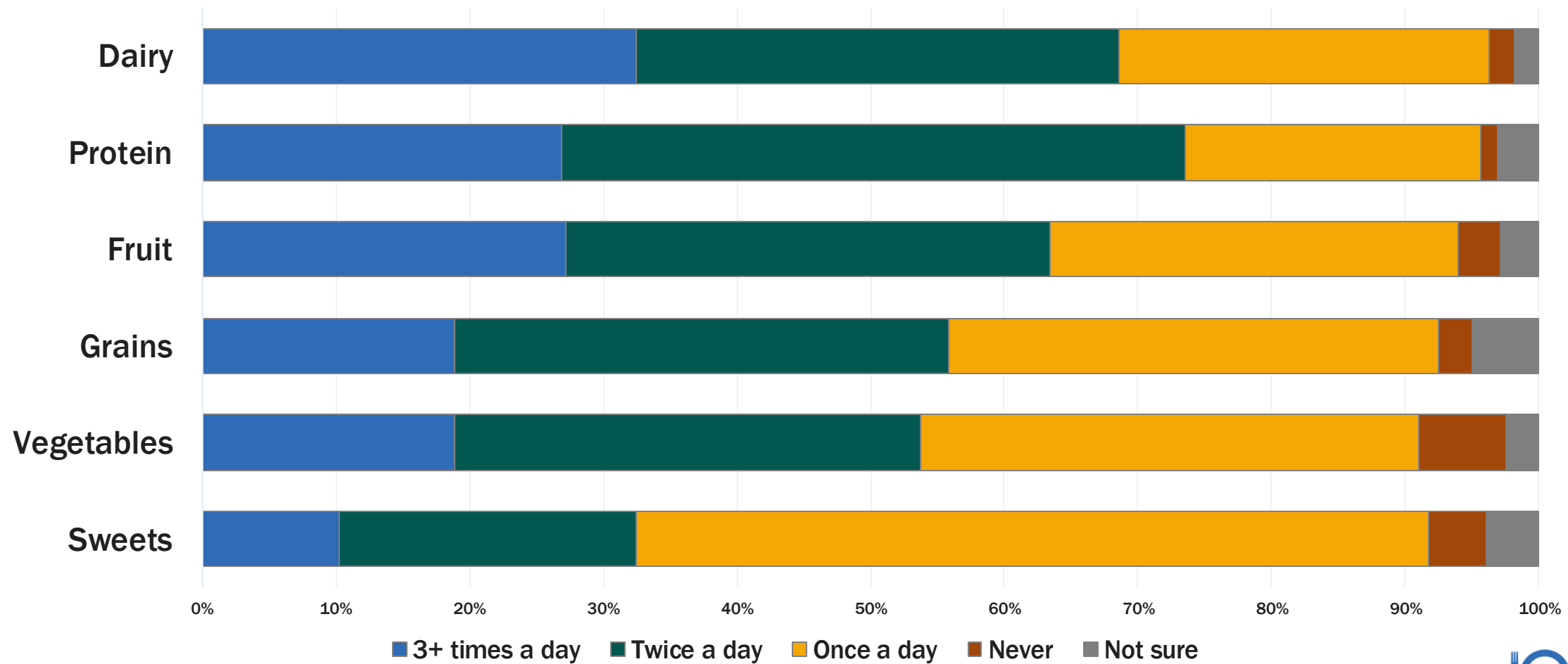
Half indicate that their child's overall health and nutrition has become somewhat or much better as the child has aged



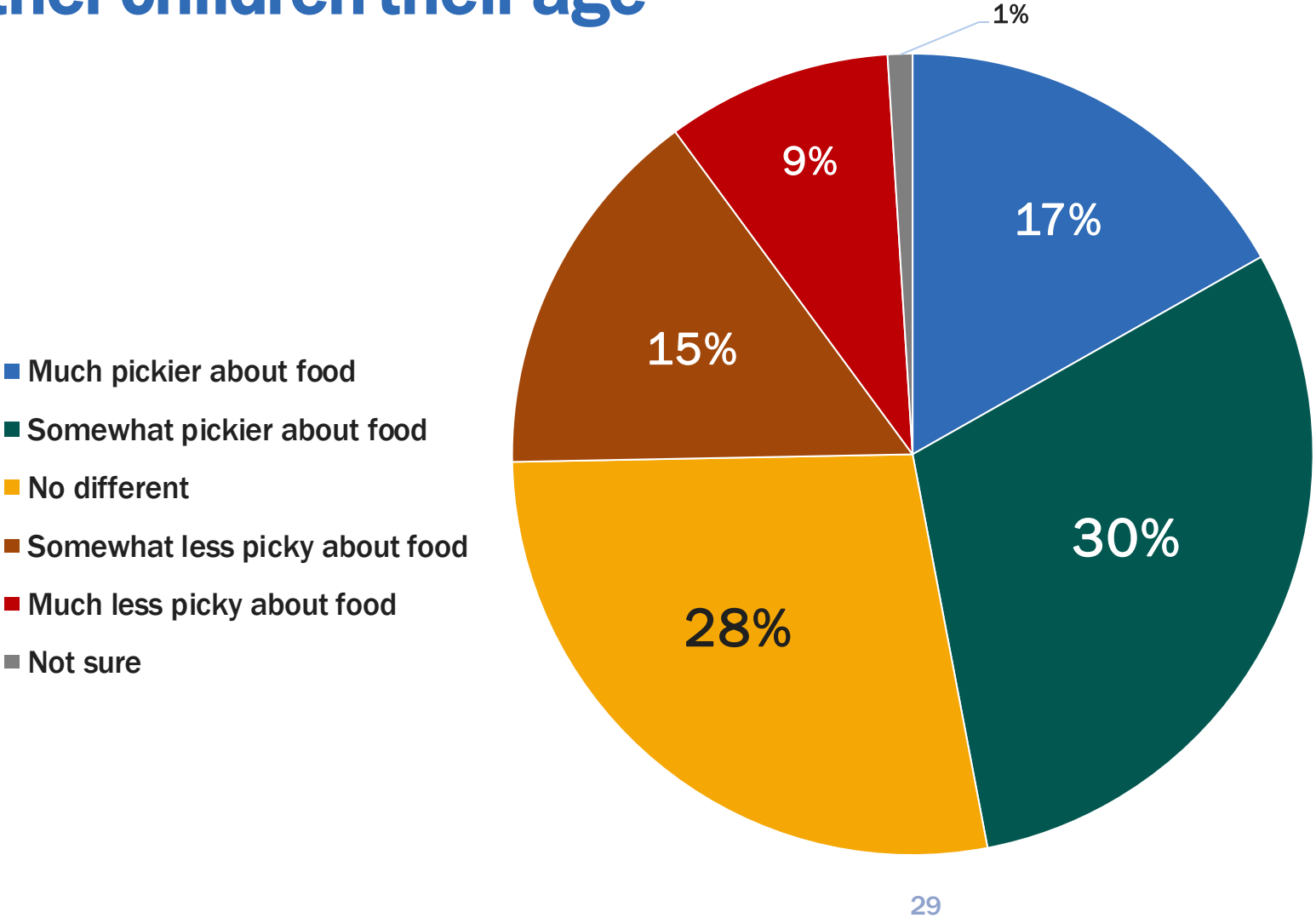
Eating Behaviors and Patterns



Roughly 1 in 3 say their child consumes dairy, protein and/or fruit 3+ times a day; over 9 in 10 report child consumes sweets at least once a day

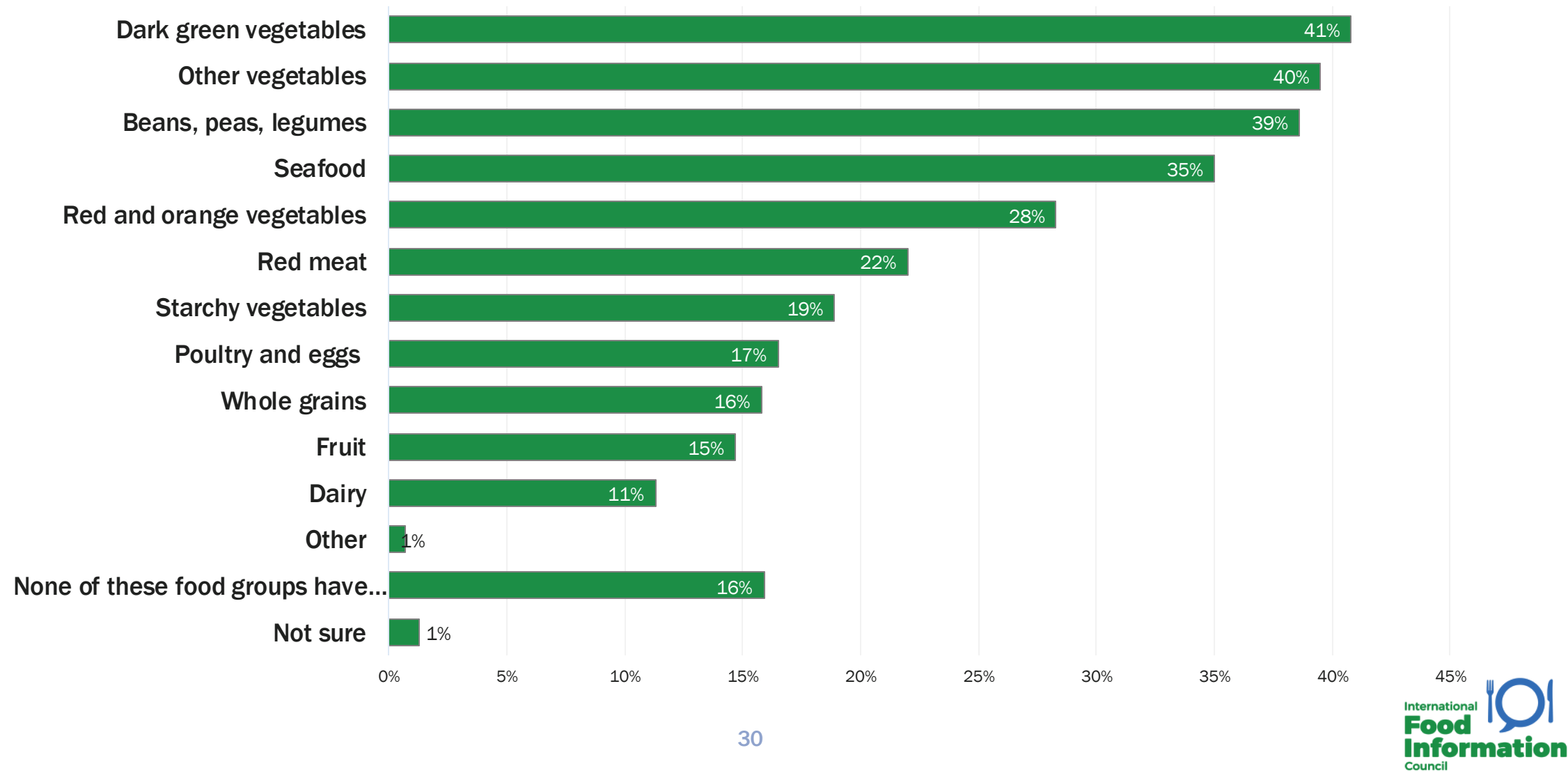


Nearly half identify their child as somewhat or much pickier than other children their age



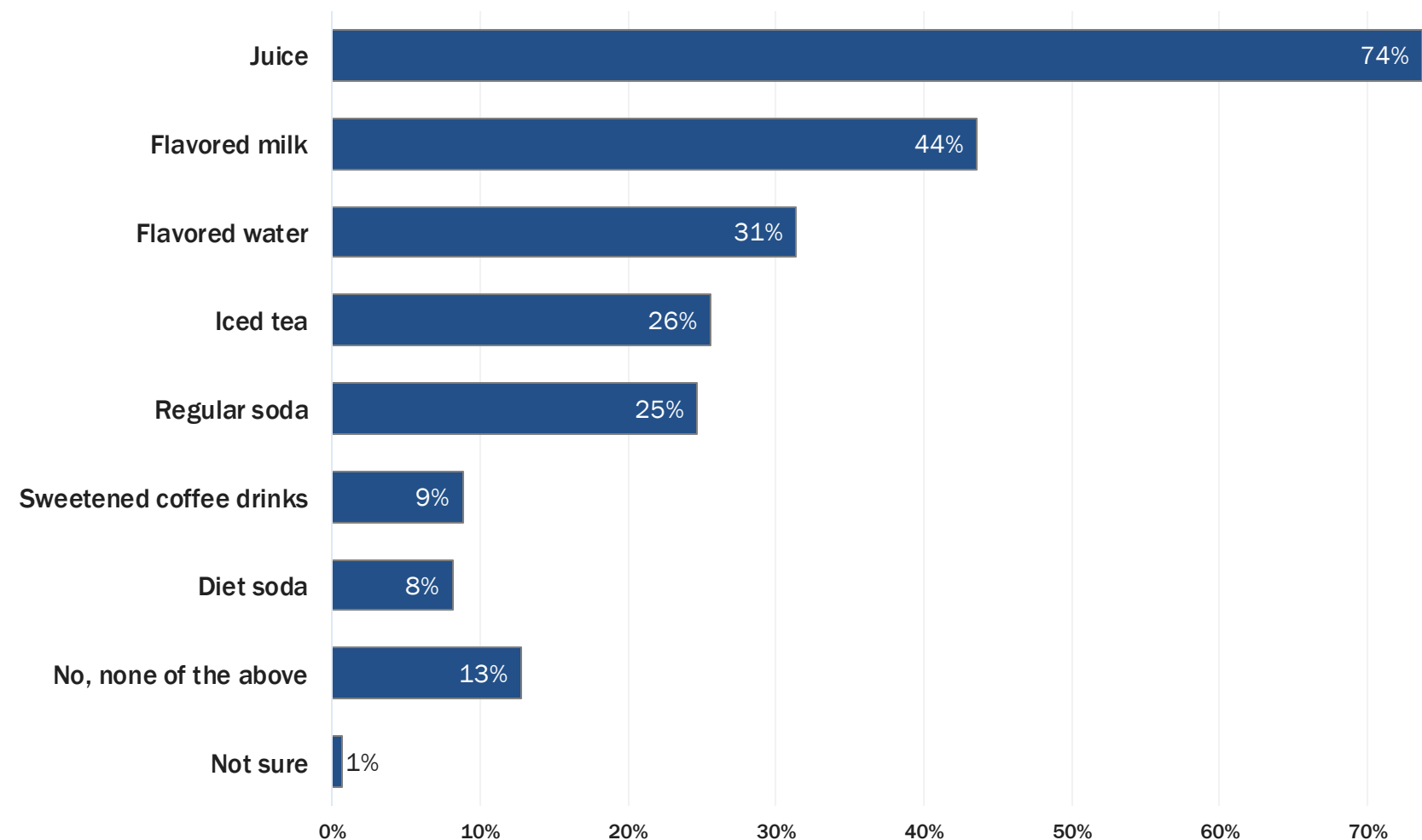
More women (49% vs. 42% of men) and SNAP and/or WIC recipients (55% vs. 42% no food assistance program) indicated that their child is much pickier about food than other children their age

Two in 5 say vegetables and beans/peas/legumes are difficult to get their child to eat



Q26: What food groups have been difficult to get your child or the child you care for to eat? n = 1,000

Nearly 3 out of 4 parents/caregivers say their child regularly drinks juice

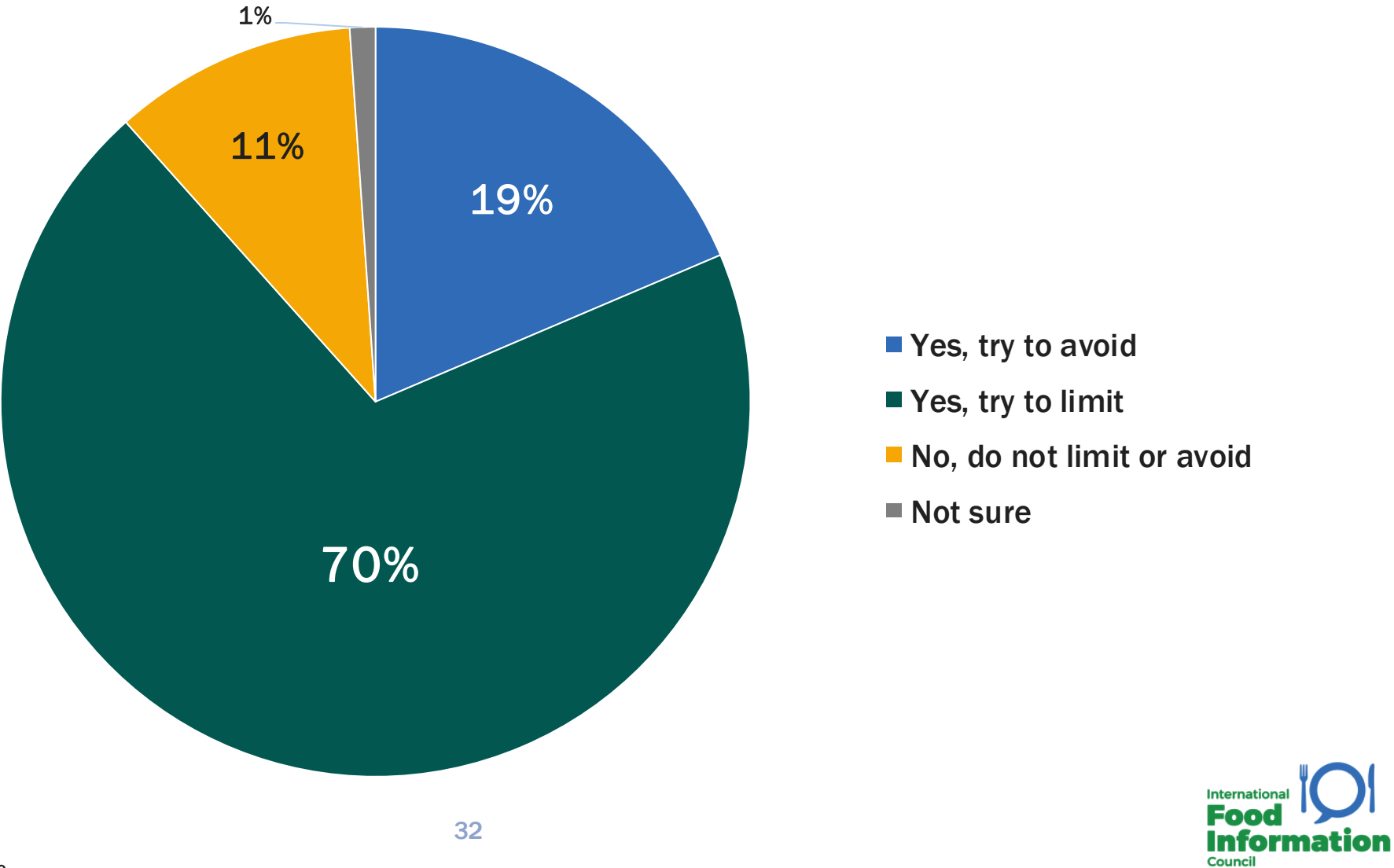


Black or African American parents/caregivers were more likely than non-Hispanic whites to say their child regularly drinks juice (82% vs. 74%), iced tea (36% vs. 27%) and regular soda (32% vs. 23%)

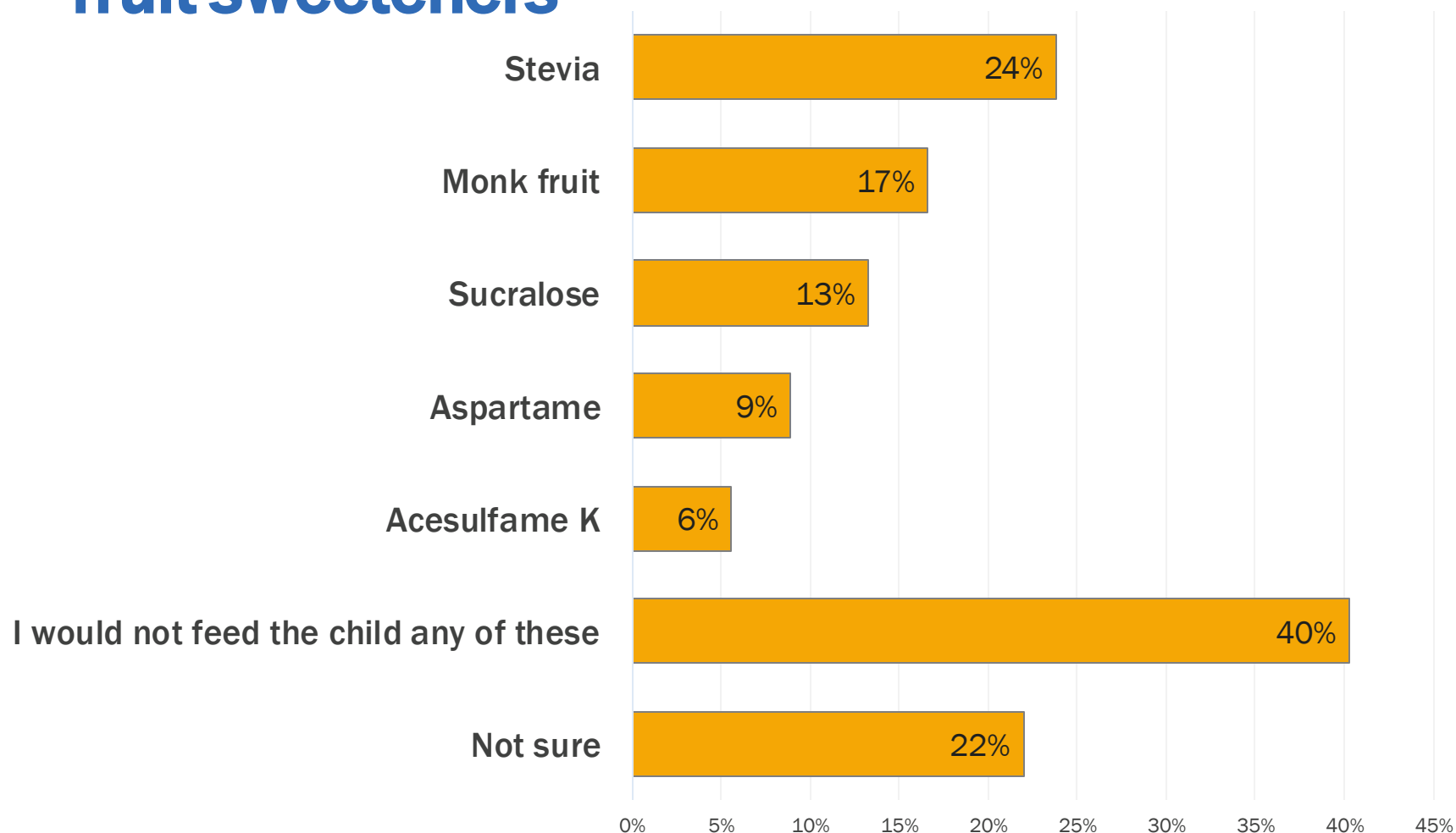
Hispanics were more likely than non-Hispanic whites to indicate their child regularly consumes soda (34% vs. 23%)

Parents/caregivers with children age 5-7 and 8-10 were more likely to say their child regularly drinks regular soda (26% and 31%, vs. 17% of those with children age 2-4)

Vast majority of parents/caregivers try to limit or avoid sugars in their child's diet



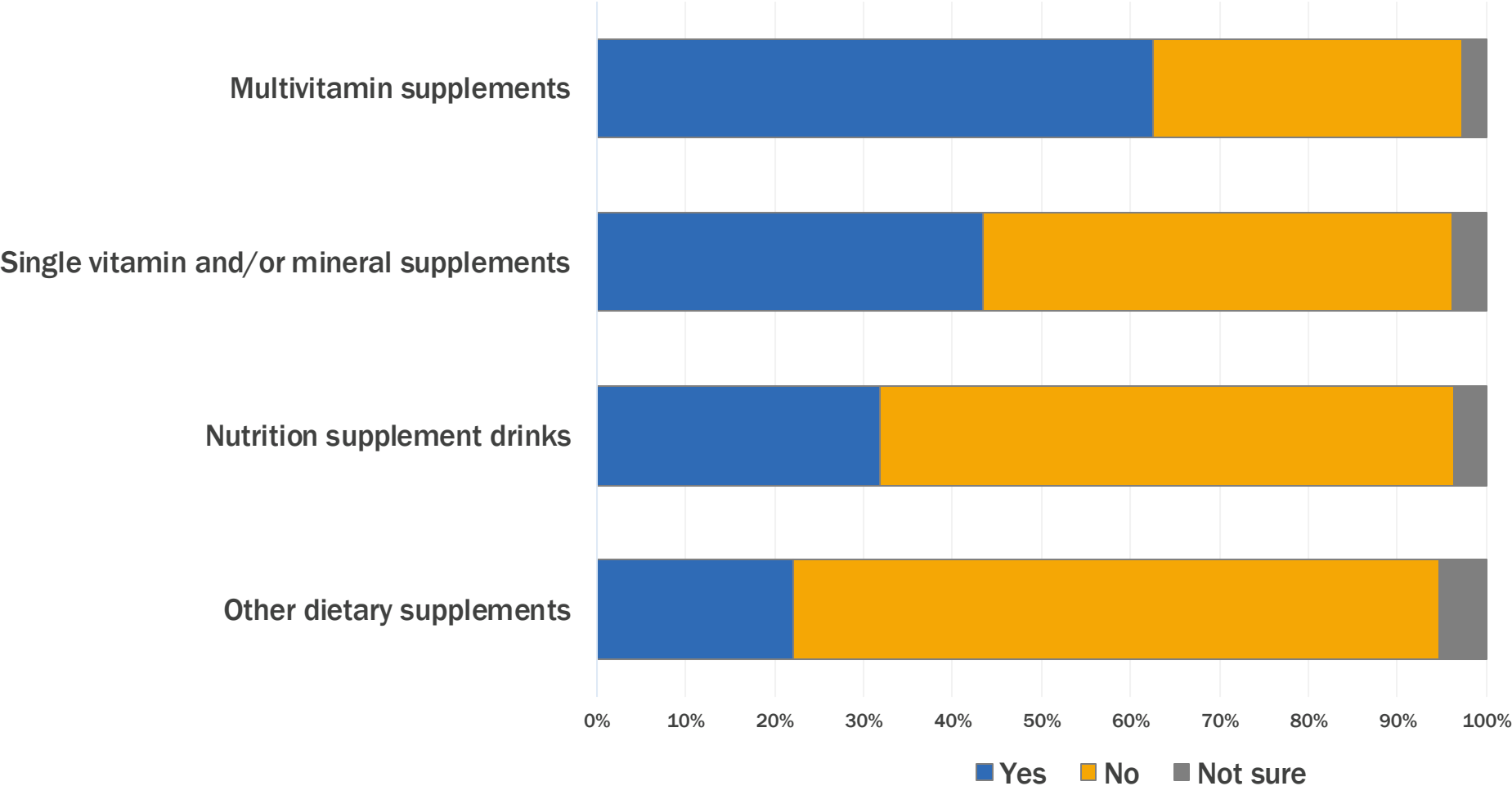
Compared with other low-calorie sweeteners, parents/caregivers are most open to offering foods/beverages with stevia and monk fruit sweeteners



"I would not feed my child any of these":

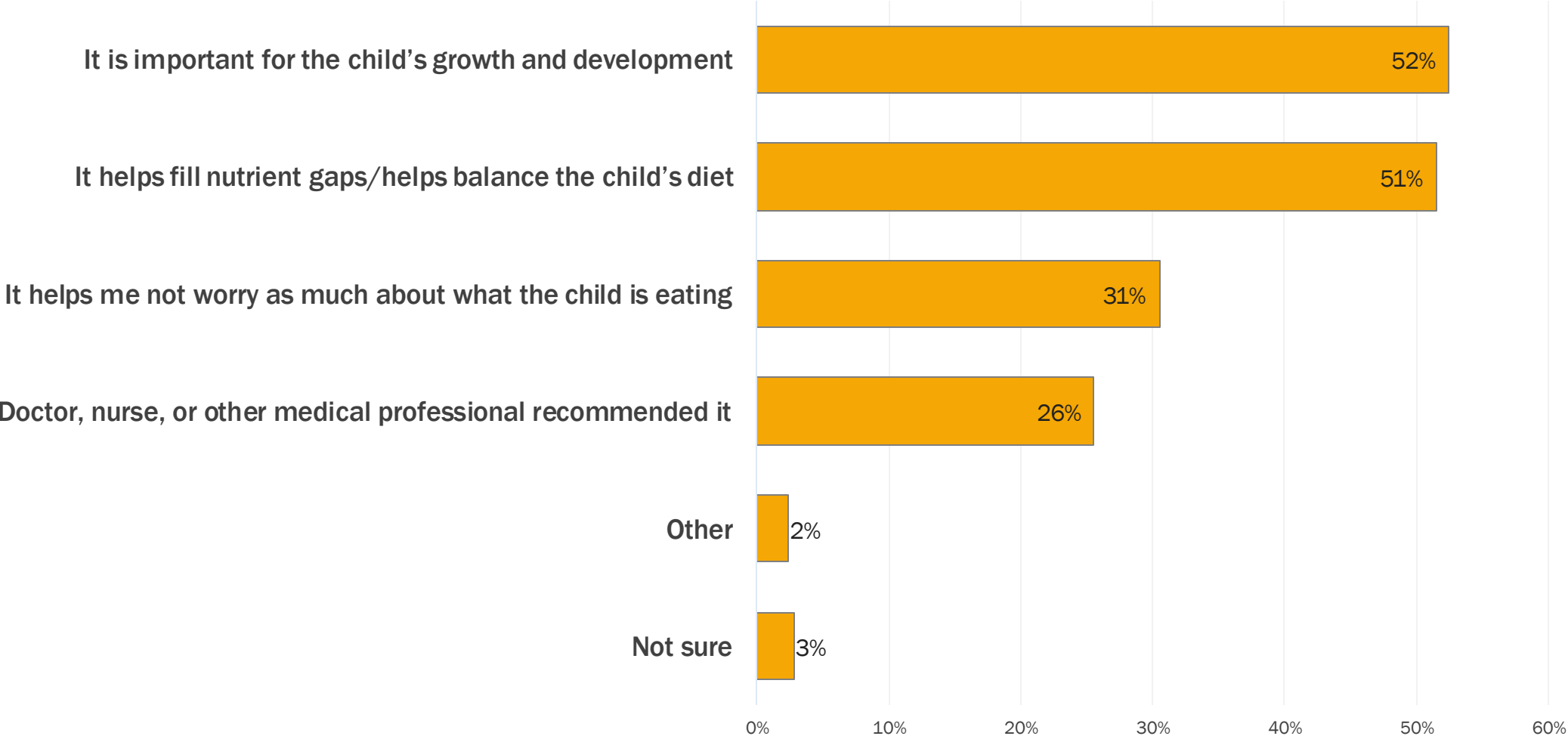
- More women (44% vs. 31% of men)
- More 40+ year-olds (47% vs. 37% of 30-39-year-olds)
- More with an income <\$50k (48% vs. 33% for income between \$50K-\$100K; 34% for income >\$100K)
- More with no college degree (44% vs. 37%)

Most children take at least one form of a dietary supplement

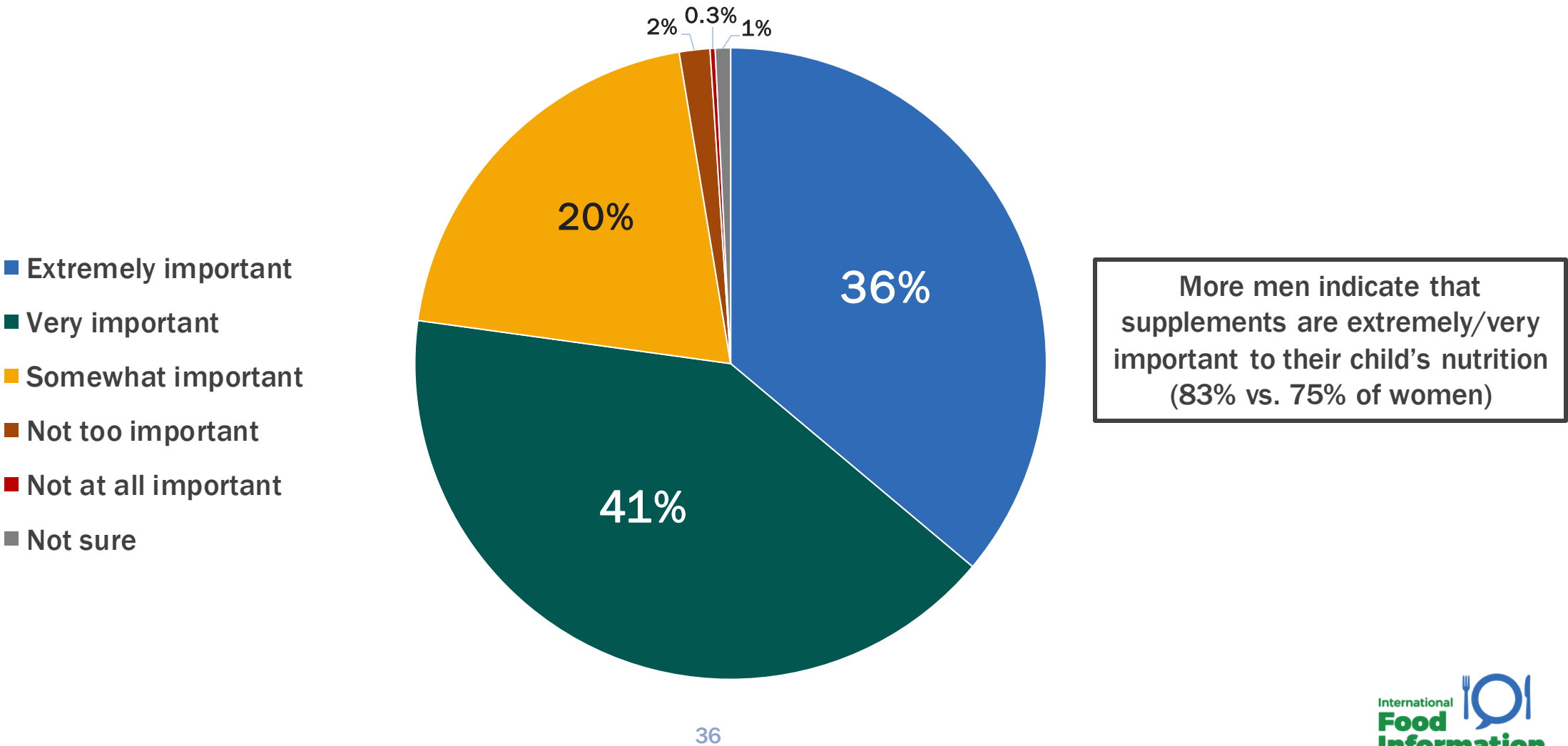


Children living in urban/suburban areas are more likely to consume single vitamin/mineral supplements, nutrition supplement drinks and other dietary supplements vs. those living in rural/small town areas (47% vs. 34%, 36% vs. 22% and 25% vs. 13%, respectively)

Child’s growth and development and filling nutrient gaps are top reasons for giving dietary supplements



More than 3 in 4 think the supplements they give their child are extremely or very important



Impact of COVID-19 on Child Nutrition and Eating Habits



More than half indicated their child's nutrition was not impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic

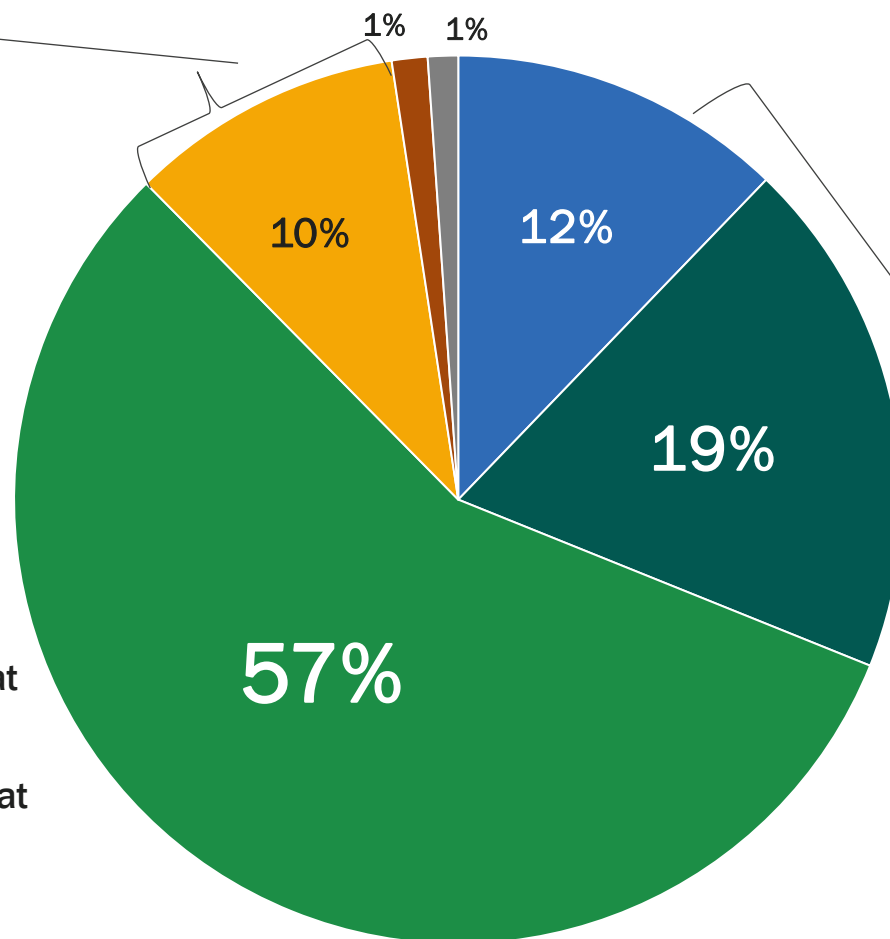
Of the children with worse nutrition during the pandemic:

- 23% due to snacking (amount and/or types of snacks)
- 22% due to limited variety of food/access to fresh food
- 21% due to unhealthy/convenient food choices

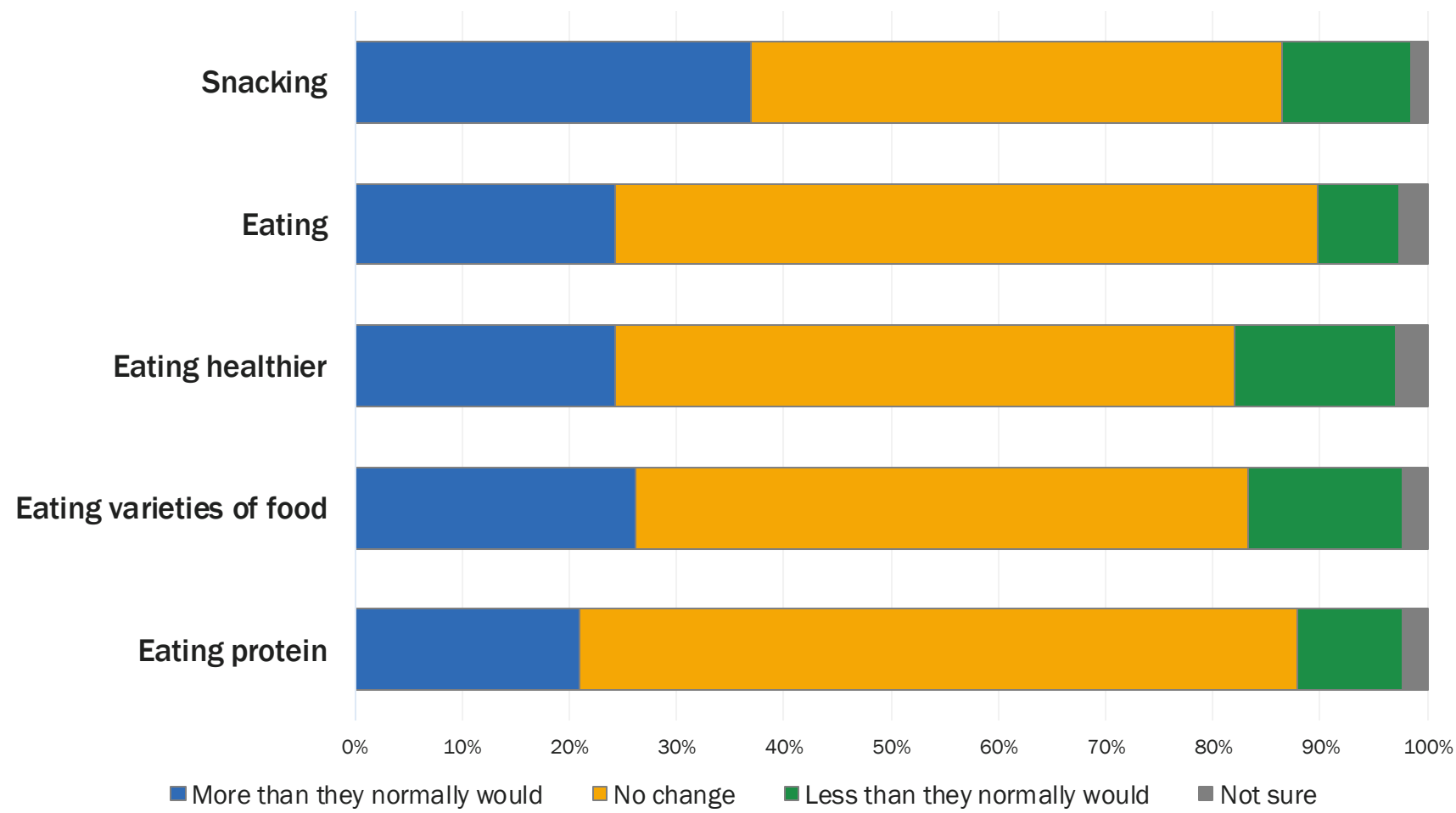
Of the children with improved nutrition during the pandemic:

- 16% due to eating healthier
- 15% due to homemade meals
- 15% due to monitoring food intake/options

- Improved greatly
- Improved somewhat
- Stayed the same
- Worsened somewhat
- Worsened greatly
- Not sure



Most parents/caregivers say there's been no change in their child's eating habits as a result of COVID-19



More parents/caregivers of 8-10-year-old children say they've been snacking more (43%) and eating more (28%) than they normally would vs. their 2-4-year-old counterparts (30% snacking and 19% eating more)

31% of Black/African American and 31% of Hispanic parents/caregivers indicated their child is eating more than they normally would, vs. 23% of white consumers

Over half of parents/caregivers say they're cooking for their child at home more as a result of COVID-19



32% of SNAP and/or WIC recipients indicated they had to look for food with a longer shelf-life (vs. 25% of those who do not utilize food assistance programs)

Men and those with an income >\$100K have focused more on foods to boost their child's immune system vs. women and those making <\$100K per year



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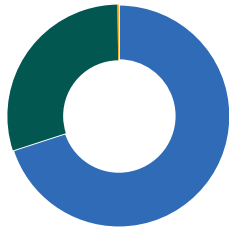
International Food
Information Council

Demographics

Demographics

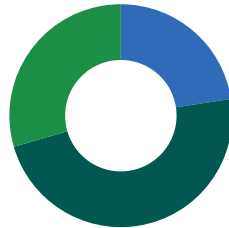
Gender

- Female (70.0%)
- Male (29.8%)
- Prefer to self-describe (0.2%)



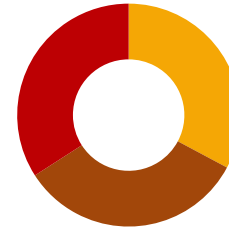
Age

Parent/Guardian



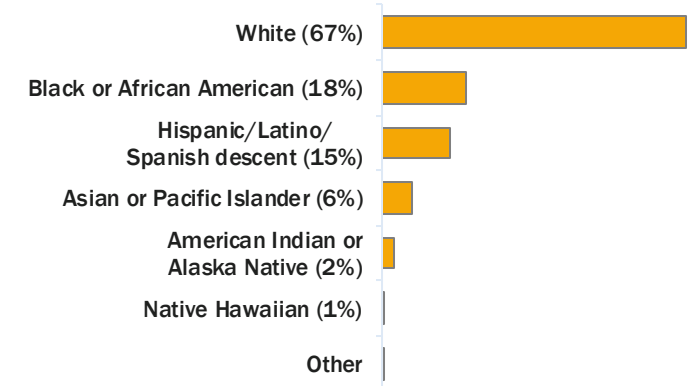
- 18-29 (23%)
- 30-39 (48%)
- 40+ (30%)

Child (2-10 years)

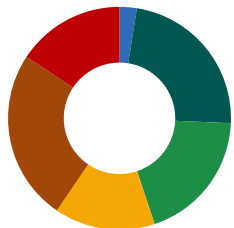


- 2-4 years (33%)
- 5-7 years (33%)
- 8-10 years (34%)

Race or Ethnicity*

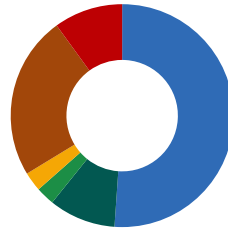


Education



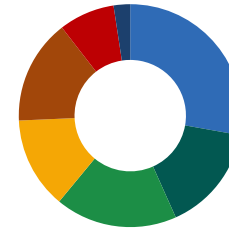
- Less than high school (3%)
- Graduated high school (23%)
- Some college, no degree (19%)
- Associate's degree (15%)
- Bachelor's degree (25%)
- Graduate/professional degree (16%)

Employment Status



- Working full-time (51%)
- Working part-time (10%)
- Student (3%)
- Retired (3%)
- Homemaker (24%)
- Unemployed (10%)

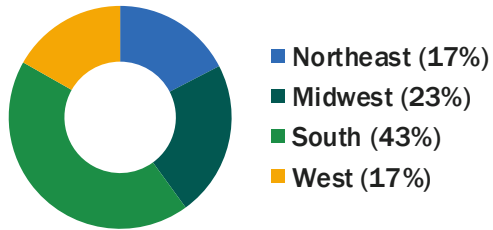
Income



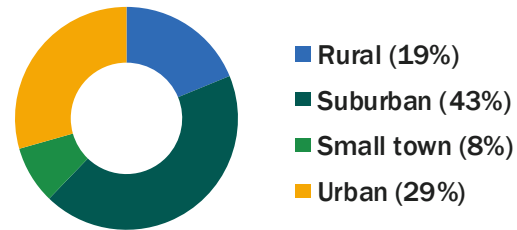
- Less than \$35,000 (28%)
- \$35,000 to less than \$50,000 (16%)
- \$50,000 to less than \$75,000 (18%)
- \$75,000 to less than \$100,000 (13%)
- \$100,000 to less than \$150,000 (15%)
- \$150,000 and above (8%)
- Not sure/prefer not to answer (2%)

Demographics

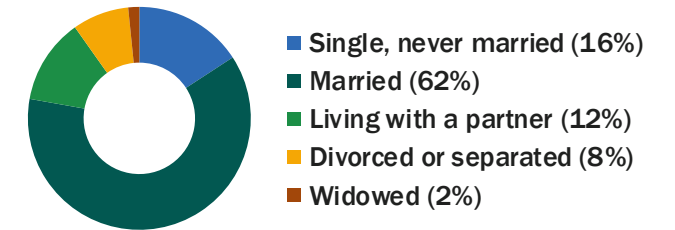
Region



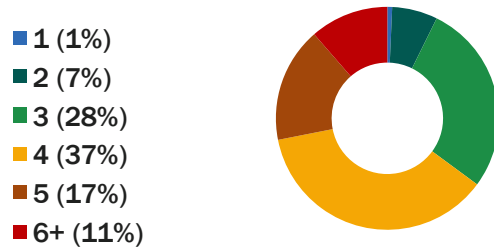
Area



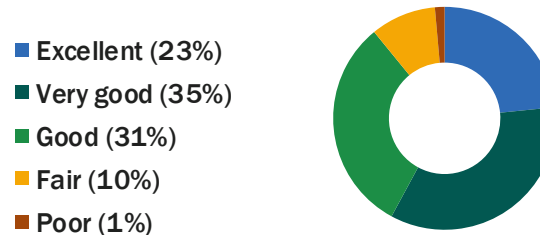
Marital Status



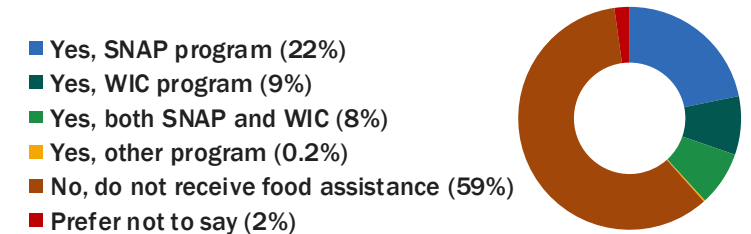
Number of People in Household



General Health



Food Assistance





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