



American Consumer Perceptions of Sodium in the Diet

JULY 2024



METHODOLOGY



The International Food Information Council (IFIC) commissioned an online survey among U.S. consumers to measure knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about sodium consumption. One thousand adults ages 18 years and older completed the online survey from March 7-9, 2024, and respondents were weighted to ensure proportional results. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

The Bayesian confidence level for the survey sample (n=1000) is 3.5, which is roughly equivalent to a margin of error of ± 3.1 at the 95% confidence level. Callouts of statistically significant results are included where appropriate on slides displaying results. Something is statistically significant if the result cannot be attributed to random chance. Statistical significance in this report is only compared within each demographic group (e.g., age, race, gender, etc.).

SUGGESTED CITATION:

International Food Information Council (IFIC). 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Consumer Perceptions of Sodium in the Diet. July 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Taste is the leading purchase driver for food and beverages, according to nearly two decades of data from the [IFIC Food & Health Survey](#). Salt (i.e., sodium chloride) is an ingredient that impacts taste—via saltiness but also through other effects that enhance the overall eating experience, such as augmenting sweetness or reducing bitter. Americans typically consume more sodium than is recommended and are encouraged to take steps to cut back.

American adults should consume [no more than 2,300 milligrams](#) (mg) of sodium per day. However, the average American adult consumes about 3,400 mg of sodium per day. [Nine out of 10 Americans](#) consume too much sodium. Sandwiches and rice, pasta, and other grain-based mixed dishes are among the [top sources of sodium](#). [More than 70% of the sodium](#) that Americans consume comes from packaged and prepared foods, while about 11% is added during cooking or eating.

Sodium is an essential nutrient. [Biology and learned experience](#) influence liking for salty food: the more we consume, the more we set taste expectations for it. On the other hand, it is possible to shift our palettes to prefer less salty foods—an endeavor best undertaken through gradual stepdown of sodium consumption instead of precipitous elimination.

Sodium is a nutrient that many consumers say they are trying to limit or avoid. To that end, there are tools available such as reduced-sodium or sodium-free [ingredients](#) and cooking techniques that enhance flavor while using less sodium. For example, potassium chloride (KCl) and monosodium glutamate (MSG) are among the more well-studied food ingredients that can be used to enhance flavor while also reducing sodium content. KCl offers a salty taste perception but may also taste bitter, while MSG enhances flavor with an umami sensation. Herbs and spices, as well as grilling and sauteing, can elevate a flavor experience without adding sodium.

IFIC commissioned this *IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Consumer Perceptions of Sodium in the Diet* to study the U.S. consumer mindset related to sodium, their knowledge of how much they consume contrasted with recommended amounts, and trusted sources for information about sodium.



KEY FINDINGS

Half of Americans do not know how much sodium they consume each day. Estimates of sodium intake by the other half vary widely.

When asked about their personal daily sodium consumption, 48% of Americans say they “don’t know” how much they consume. Among the other half (52%) who selected an amount of sodium that they believe they consume each day, 20% say they consume “less than 1,000 mg” and only 6% say they consume amounts more than 2,300 mg, the amount recommended not to exceed per day (i.e., Upper Limit).

Nearly half of Americans say they do not know how much sodium is recommended to consume per day.

Forty-eight percent of consumers say they “don’t know” how much daily sodium is recommended. The other half (52%) conveyed their awareness of the daily sodium recommendation, with most perceiving the amount to be significantly lower than it is: 17% said “less than 1,000 mg”; 12% “about 1,000 mg”; 12% “about 1,500 mg”; 9% “about 2,300 mg”; 2% “about 3,000 mg”; and 1% “more than 3,000 mg.” Overall, perceptions of daily sodium intake recommendations are similar to estimates of personal sodium intake.

More than half of Americans say they are currently limiting sodium or are interested in doing so but have not yet taken action.

Most of the Americans surveyed report either “currently limiting sodium” (37%) in their diets or are “interested in limiting sodium but have not yet started” (17%). Alternatively, 4 in 10 say they “do not think about sodium” in their diets (23%); “do not need to limit sodium” (11%); or are “not interested in limiting sodium” (6%). The remaining 17% of survey takers are interested in limiting sodium but have not yet started.

Improving overall health is the top motivator for limiting sodium intake. Consumers are also motivated because of a current health condition, a healthcare provider recommended it, and/or to reduce water retention.

Of the subset of consumers who were either currently limiting sodium, interested in it, or who say they have limited sodium in the past, the number one reason (65%) for limiting sodium is improving overall health. Other motivators include “to manage a current health condition” (33%); “a healthcare provider recommended it” (31%); and “to reduce water retention” (30%). Only 11% said their motivation for wanting to reduce sodium consumption was because of a recommendation from friends and family.

KEY FINDINGS

Americans say packaged food delivers most of their dietary sodium.

When Americans consider their sources of sodium in their diet, 29% say the top source is packaged food, such as canned food and frozen meals. In contrast, nearly four in ten say their top source of dietary sodium is the salt added during cooking (22%) or while eating (15%). Only 1 in 10 (9%) Americans are unsure of their top source of sodium.

Nearly half of Americans report concern about their sodium intake.

While Americans are tuning into sodium, they are somewhat mixed about the level of concern they have for their personal intake—recall that 48% say they “don’t know” how much sodium they consume. Regardless of personal intake awareness, almost half (46%) say that they are concerned about their sodium intake, while the rest are fairly split between ambivalence (25%) and not concerned (30%).

Americans say they think more positively about a food or beverage promoted as low in sodium.

Americans expressed positivity toward foods and beverages advertised as low in sodium. While nearly 6 in 10 (56%) think more positively about such items, more than 4 in 10 were neutral (32%) and/or did not think more positively (11%) about items advertised as low in sodium.

Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Consumer Perceptions of Sodium in the Diet

Among a subset of shoppers who check Nutrition Facts for sodium when grocery shopping, while comparing sodium content of two similar products, more than half say they would choose the lower sodium or healthier option.

When comparing sodium content between two similar products before purchase, 31% said they would choose the one lower in sodium, and 26% said they favor the healthier option. Nearly 4 in 10 would not base their choice on sodium or health, with 15% choosing the less expensive option; 13% choosing the one they think would taste best; and 10% choosing the brand they or their family prefers (10%).

Trust in sodium information sources is highest for medical or nursing professionals, health organizations, registered dietitians/nutritionists, and U.S. government agencies.

When asked about trust in a variety of potential sources for information about consuming sodium, health professionals and organizations lead the way. More than 4 in 10 (44%) said they trust medical or nursing professionals and health organizations (43%) such as the American Heart Association. Approximately one-third of respondents said they trust registered dietitians/nutritionists (35%) and U.S. government agencies (30%) such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Food and Drug Administration. Some Americans say that they do not trust any of the options provided (13%).

IMPLICATIONS

Results from the 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Consumer Perceptions of Sodium in the Diet show that about half of Americans do not know how much sodium they consume per day and less than 10% can correctly identify the daily Upper Limit for sodium. Understanding how much sodium is recommended to consume each day may lead to healthier dietary choices, and more than half of Americans say they are currently limiting their sodium intake, primarily motivated to improve their overall health. Americans point to packaged food as the top source of their daily dietary sodium and think more positively about foods and beverages that are advertised as low in sodium. Yet, sodium and health are not the only factors that influence food purchasing decision—price, taste, and brand also matter.

The food and nutrition information landscape is congested making it difficult for credible content to break through. Consumers trust medical or nursing professionals, health organizations, registered dietitians/nutritionists, and U.S. government agencies for information about sodium consumption. Consumers also currently have access to sodium information on the Nutrition Facts Panel and may also find sodium content prominently displayed on the front of many food and beverage packages.

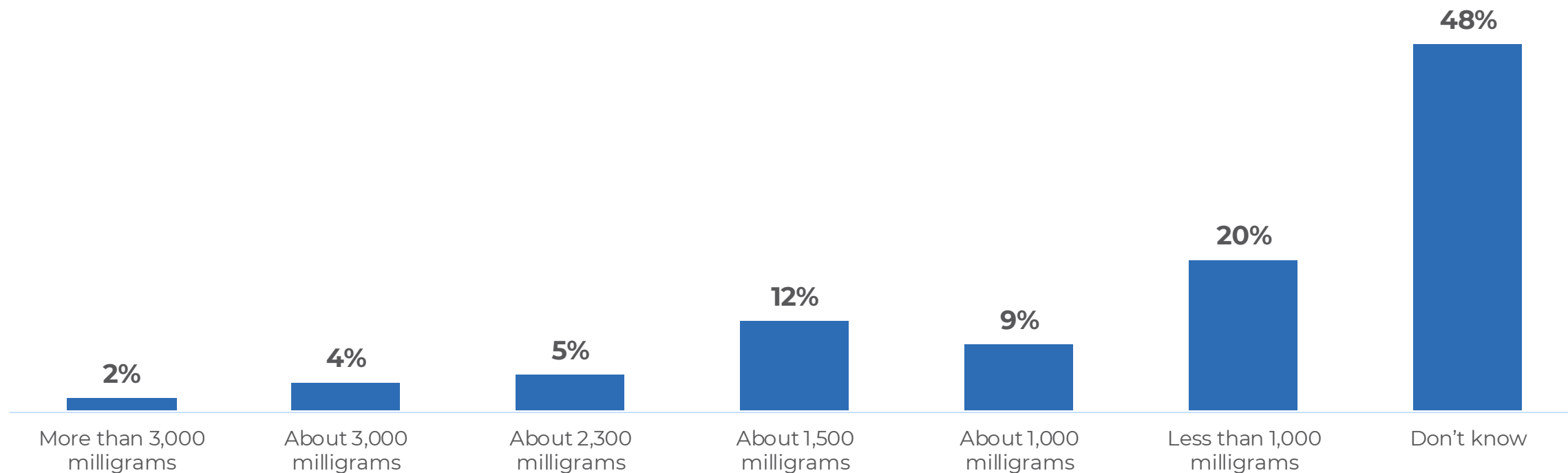
Recognizing a broad, gradual approach is prudent to reduce sodium in the food supply. In 2021, the FDA issued [voluntary sodium reduction targets](#) for food manufacturers, restaurants, and food service operations. This deliberate approach aims to reduce sodium consumption by helping to reset Americans' preference for sodium. Furthermore, the American diet quality rating, as measured by the [Healthy Eating Index](#) - 2020, is 58 out of 100. Increasing underconsumed food groups, including fruits, vegetables, and dairy, is a priority to help improve American diet quality by increasing intake of beneficial nutrients, such as [potassium](#), to counteract the effects of sodium on blood pressure.

Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Consumer Perceptions of Sodium in the Diet



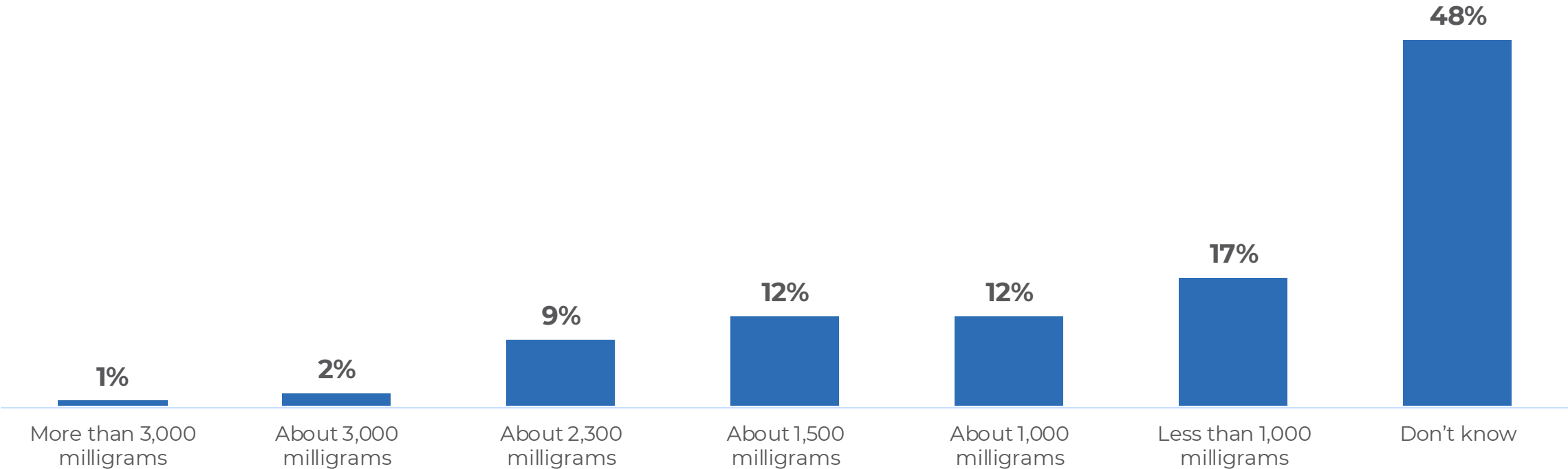
Nearly half of Americans do not know how much sodium they consume per day.

Only six percent believe they consume more sodium per day than is recommended.



Nearly half of Americans say they do not know how much sodium is recommended to consume per day.

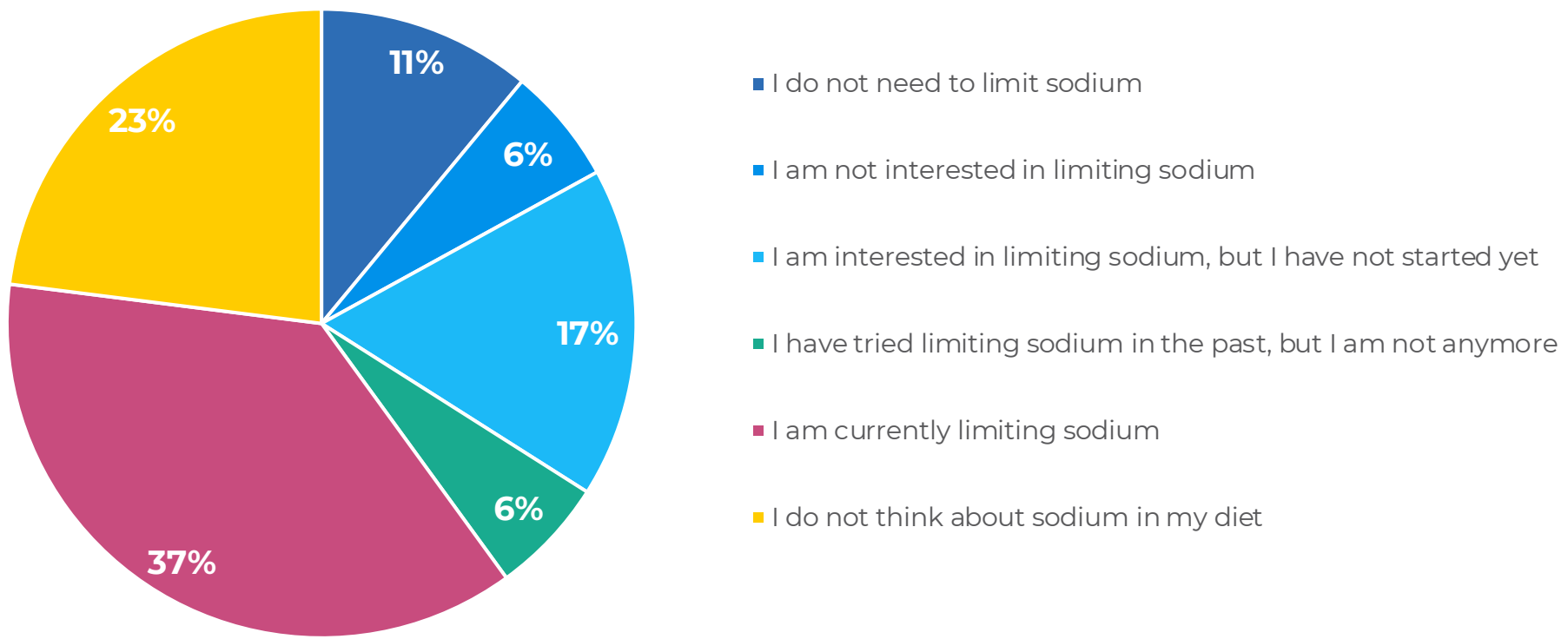
Perceptions of personal daily sodium consumption are similar to perceived sodium recommendations.



Nearly 4 in 10 are currently limiting their sodium intake.

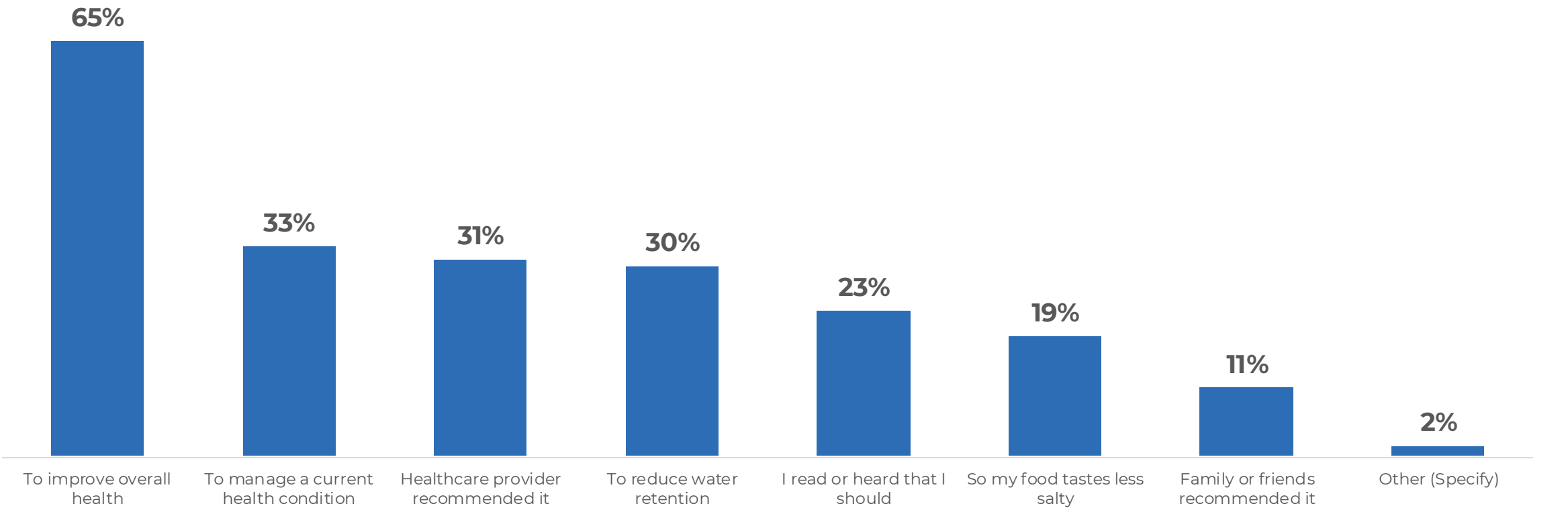
Another 4 in 10 say they do not think about sodium in their diet, do not need to limit it, or are not interested.

Approach To Sodium Consumption



Among those interested in limiting sodium intake and/or who have taken steps to do so, the top reason for wanting to limit sodium consumption is to improve overall health.

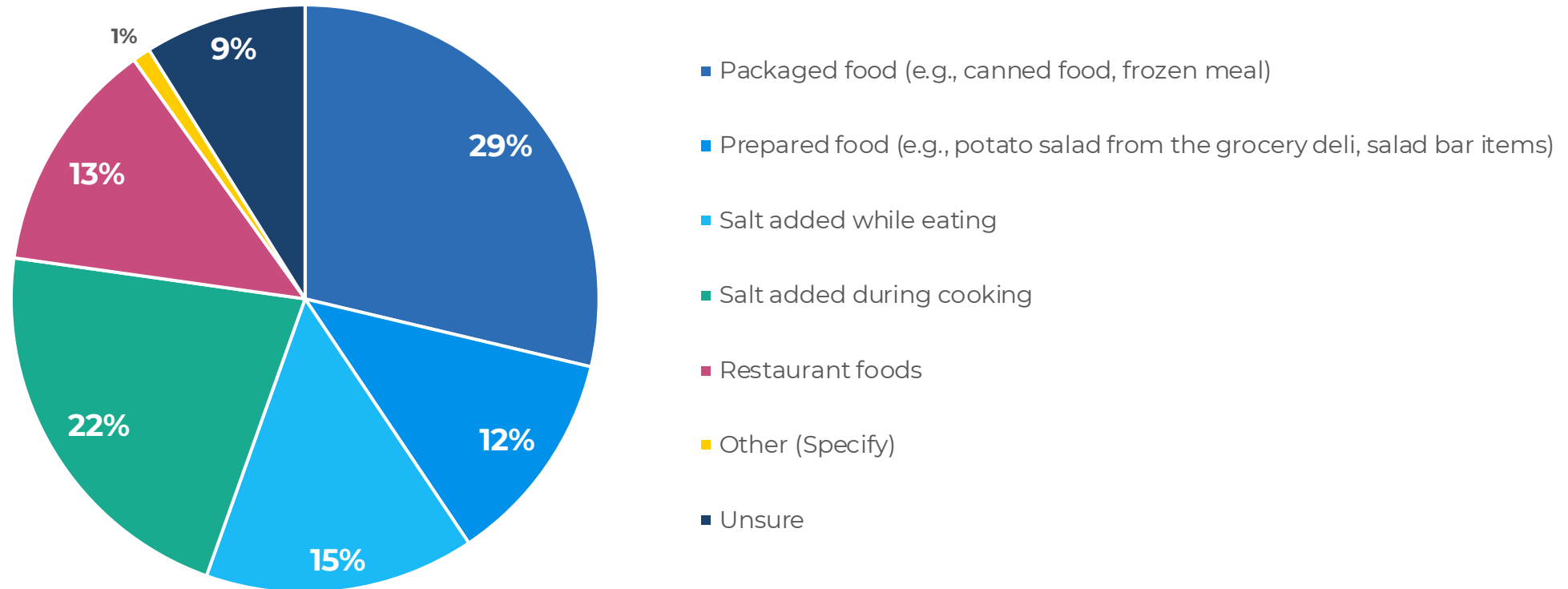
Consumers are also motivated because of a current health condition, because a healthcare provider recommended it, and to reduce water retention.



3 in 10 say packaged food is their top source of sodium.

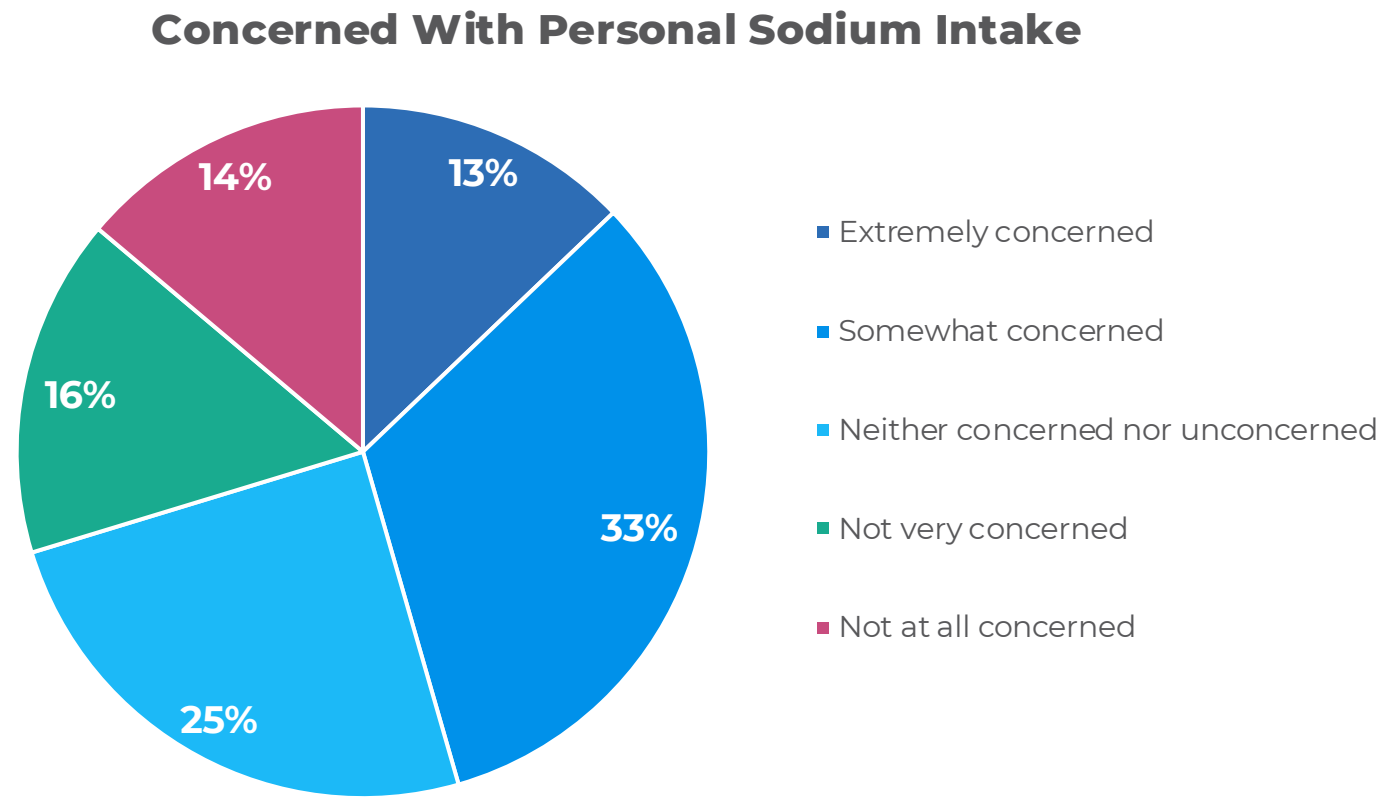
Nearly four in ten believe their top source of sodium is the salt they add during cooking or while eating.

Top Dietary Sources Of Sodium



Nearly half of Americans are concerned with their sodium intake.

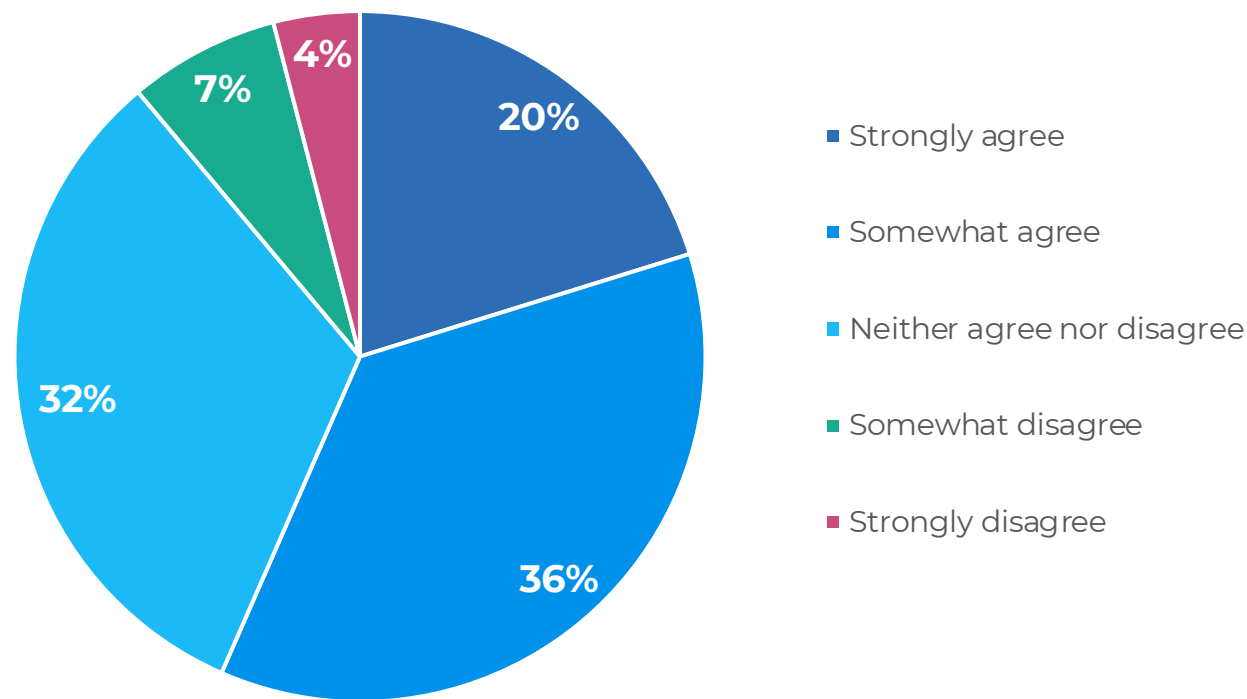
Slightly more than half are either ambivalent or not concerned about their sodium intake.



Over half of Americans think more positively of a food or beverage that is advertised as low in sodium.

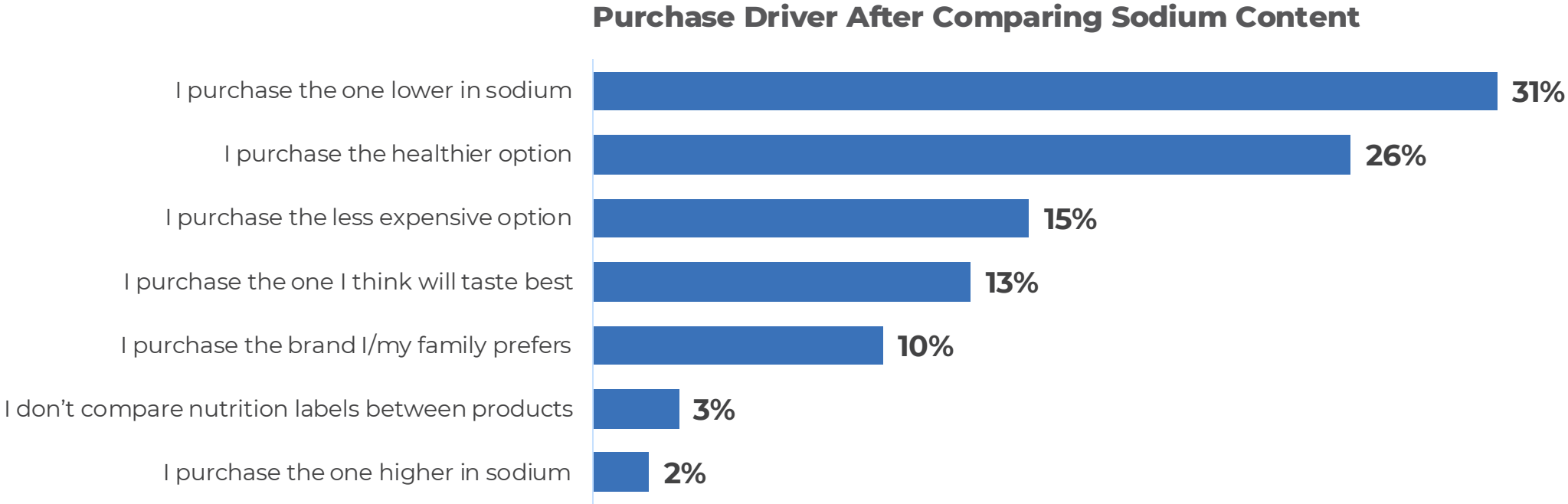
1 in 10 say they do not think more positively about a product that is advertised as low in sodium.

Positivity Toward Products Advertised As Low In Sodium



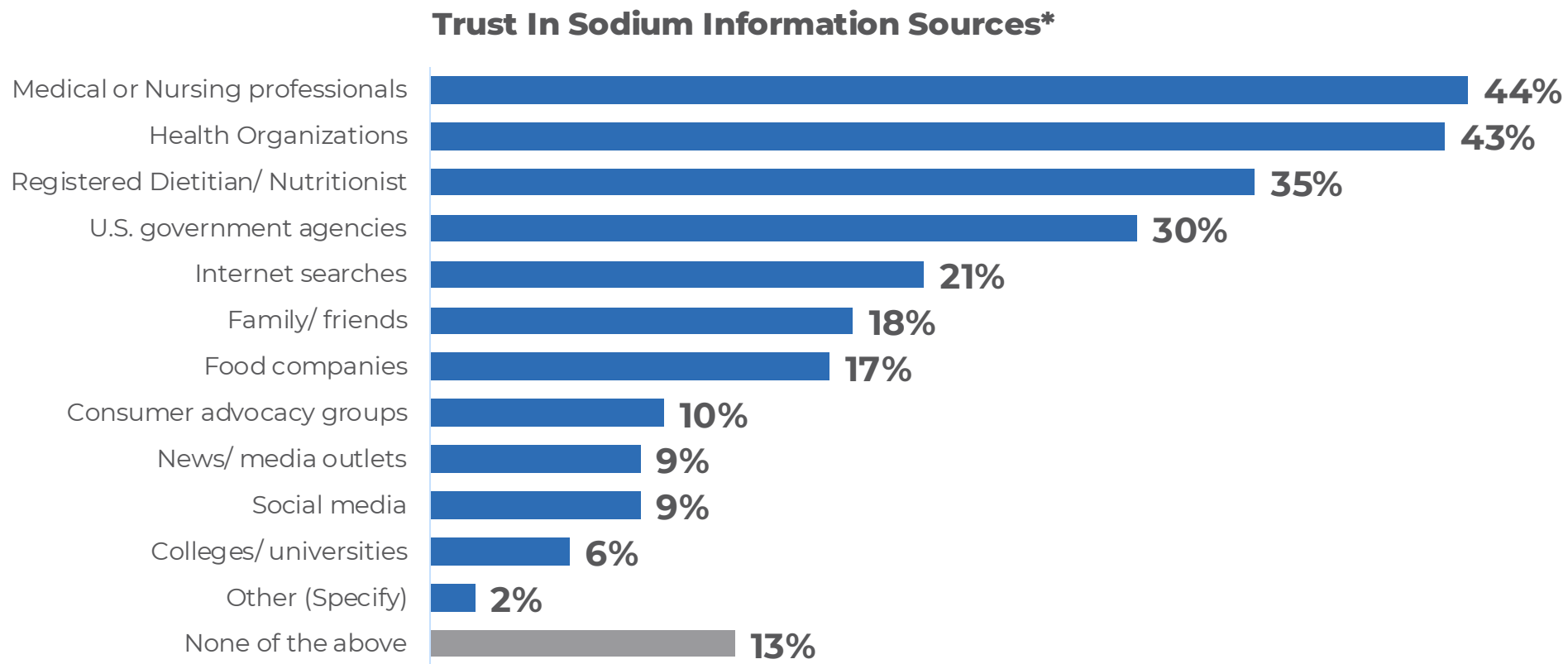
Among those who check Nutrition Facts for sodium during grocery shopping, when comparing sodium content of two similar products, more than half say they would choose the lower sodium or healthier option.

Nearly four in 10 would base their purchase decision on price, perceived taste, or preferred brand.



Medical professionals and health organizations are seen as the most trusted sources of sodium information.

One in three trust registered dietitians and U.S. government agencies to inform them about sodium while 13% said they do not trust any of the sources provided.





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