

NUTRITION OVER 50

USING FOOD TO ADDRESS CHANGING HEALTH CONCERNS



INTERNATIONAL
FOOD INFORMATION
COUNCIL FOUNDATION



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BACKGROUND

As people age, changes in health necessitate a new set of dietary needs and habits. In early adulthood, most Americans see benefits from food solely as a way to manage their weight. Beyond age 50, however, cardiovascular and muscle health surpasses weight management as top health priorities. In addition, new concerns around issues like physical and cognitive abilities, self-sufficiency, and digestive health mean that longstanding dietary habits have to evolve. It is unclear, however, how consumers translate these new needs and concerns into action in what they eat every day.

This survey seeks to provide answers on these topics and to better understand how those over 50 think about their nutrition and health and how to motivate them to make positive changes.





METHODOLOGY

- Online survey of 1,005 Americans ages 50 and older. Fielded January 30 to February 9, 2018. Took an average of 19 minutes to complete.
- The results were weighted to ensure that they are reflective of the older American population, as seen in the Census Bureau's 2017 Current Population Survey. Specifically, they were weighted by age, education, gender, race/ethnicity, and region.
- The survey was conducted by Greenwald & Associates, using ResearchNow's consumer panel.
- Support for the survey was provided, in part, by Abbott Nutrition.

Key Findings

Changing Health, Changing Habits

Overall, Americans over 50 feel good about their health, no doubt in large part because of the effort they make to eat a healthy diet. In fact, 6 in 10 say that the healthfulness of their diet has improved over the last 20 years. In addition, 9 in 10 believe eating healthy is important to maintaining their health as they age. And despite many feeling that it is difficult to eat healthy, the vast majority agree that it is never too late to make diet and lifestyle changes and nearly everyone is making some effort to do better.

At the same time, there is a significant decrease in the amount of physical activity that Americans over 50 get, in comparison to what they were used to 20 years ago. There is also a similar decline in having the energy to do the things they want to do.

The influence of healthfulness shifts significantly as consumers age: nearly 6 in 10 say it has more of an impact now than it did for them 20 years ago. Americans over 50 also admit that they are paying more attention to nutrition labels on food than they did when they were younger, with the Nutrition Facts Panel, the ingredients list, and calorie/nutrition information icons and graphics being the most commonly consulted information.

Key Findings

Healthy Eating, Healthy Outcomes

For many adults, nutrition requirements mean something new to them now that they are over 50: roughly half believe that eating healthy means something different than it did when they were younger. Adults who were surveyed believe they have a good understanding of nutrition requirements: two-thirds of all adults over age 50 say they are confident that they understand the nutrition requirements recommended for people their age. Women, in particular, feel confident about this information.

As mentioned, the vast majority of consumers over 50 are making some effort to eat healthy, although fewer (between 20%-40%) make a great deal of effort on any specific healthy eating task. A similar story is true when consumers are asked to evaluate the healthfulness of their meals:

- Nearly everyone reports that their breakfast, lunch, and dinner are at least somewhat healthy
- Only half consider their meals very healthy
- Less than 1 in 5 consider them extremely healthy.
- There is a lag in healthfulness for lunch and for snacks throughout the day.

Key Findings

Healthy Eating, Healthy Outcomes (CONT.)

Adults are making an effort in their eating habits, and often do so with an eye towards long-term health and preventing future health conditions. More than 8 in 10 consider these as major reasons for why they try to eat healthy and 1 in 5 say that protecting long-term health is the top reason they make an effort. In terms of top health topics:

- Cardiovascular health is seen as most important
- Muscle health/mobility, energy and brain function are also key health motivators.
- Maintaining a healthy weight is a topic of somewhat less importance, however it has the greatest impact on consumers' actual diets.

Despite the overall desire to eat healthy, there's a perceived disconnect with official recommendations geared towards an "average healthy adult." When asked to evaluate their needs of specific food groups versus what the USDA recommends, the majority think they require a different amount. For example, half believe they require more vegetables in their diet than the recommended (2½ cups) and four in ten (39%) believe they need more protein than is recommended for the average American.

Key Findings

Purchasing Behavior

In terms of drivers of food purchasing, taste is the clear top priority: nearly 9 in 10 report that it has a high impact on the foods and beverages they purchase. Price and availability are also top drivers for many. Interestingly, familiarity with foods is highly influential for as many as 7 in 10, edging out the influence of healthfulness on purchasing and far surpassing the impact of actual brands.

While technology may be starting to exert an influence on consumer food purchasing habits, only 1 in 5 adults 50 and older say this is true for them. In-store shopping still dominates and online grocery ordering and meal kits are relatively rare. Still, for those 1 in 5 who are impacted by technology, three-quarters say technology has made it easier to eat healthy.

Key Findings

Key Motivators for Adults over 50

While the news and family and friends are the most common sources of nutrition information for Americans over 50, one's own personal healthcare professional is most likely to be the primary source. Those in relatively poorer health show even more reliance on their doctor for this information.

Adults over 50 overwhelmingly agree that it is never too late to make changes to their diet or lifestyle habits, and recognize the importance of healthy eating for staying healthy as they age. Still, many report that they wish they began eating healthier earlier in life. This underscores the importance of consistent messaging throughout the lifespan, to motivate adults to adopt healthy eating and lifestyle behaviors no matter their life stage.

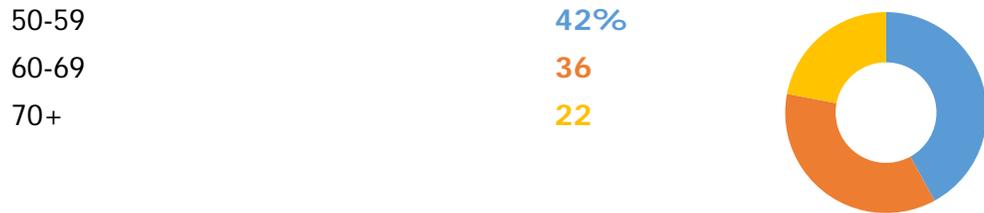
Lastly, for crafting messages that resonate with Americans over 50 and motivate this group to eat healthy, there is a clear take-away from this study: highlight the improvement to life, not just the improvement to longevity. Emotional appeals that reference the impact that a balanced diet can have on quality of life surpasses the impact of a fact-based message that references only a reduced risk of heart disease.

General Demographics

Gender



Age



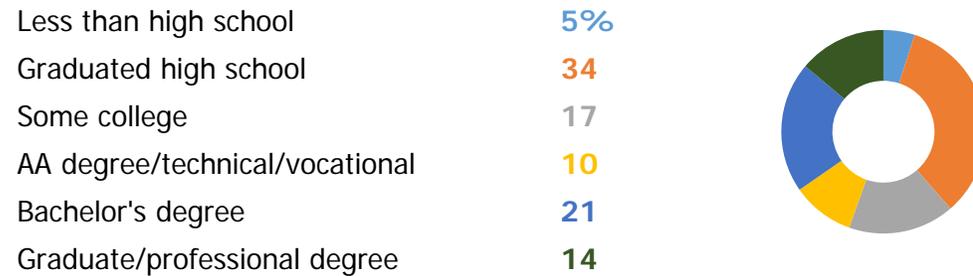
Race/Ethnicity



Household Income

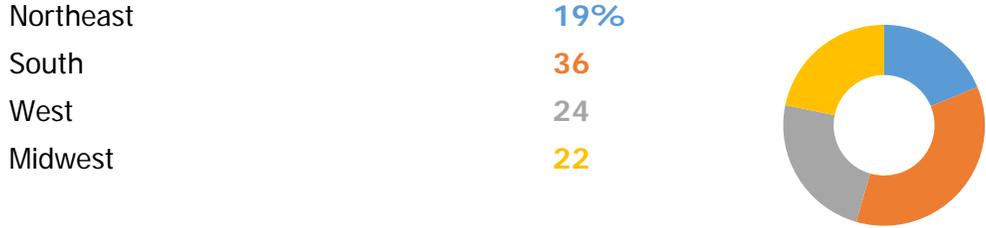


Education



Household Demographics

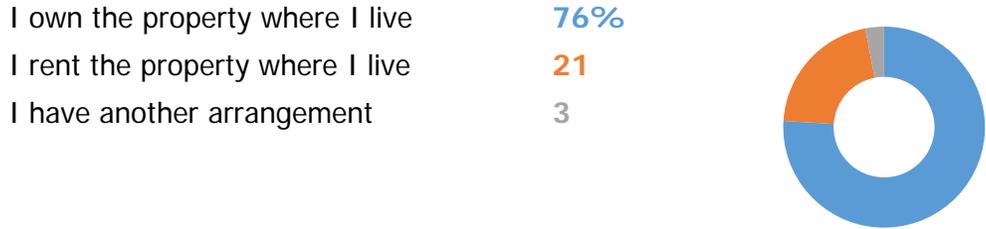
U.S. region



Type of location



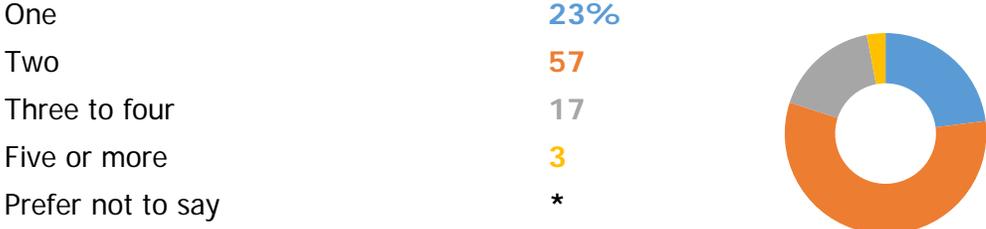
Type of residence



Marital status



Number of people in household



Household Demographics

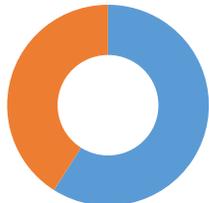
Employment status

Full time, year round	30%
Full time for part of the year	1
Part time, either year round or for part of the year	11
Not employed for pay	58



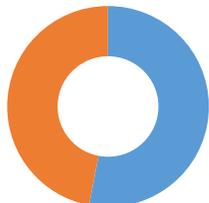
Retirement status

Retired from primary job or career	59%
Not retired from primary job or career	41



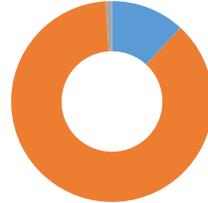
Spouse's/Partner's retirement status

Retired from primary job or career	53%
Not retired from primary job or career	47



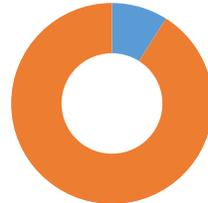
Food assistance

Receives food assistance	12%
Does not receive food assistance	88
Prefer not to say	1



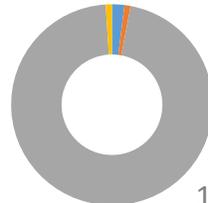
Provide ongoing care for adult family member

Provides care	9%
Does not provide care	91
Prefer not to say	*



Receives ongoing care

An unpaid friend of family member	2%
A nurse of other paid professional caregiver	1
No, do not receive care from either	97
Prefer not to say	1



Health Demographics

BMI Score

Normal or low	31%
Overweight	37
Obese	29
No answer	2



Health Conditions *(Multiple responses accepted)*

High blood pressure	41%
High cholesterol	35%
Arthritis	19%
Diabetes	16%
Stress/anxiety/depression	12%
Overweight/obesity	10%
Heart disease	6%
Osteoporosis	4%
Cancer	4%
Lung disease	3%
Recent surgery	3%
Mobility/functionality or muscle loss	2%
Recent hospitalization	2%
Stroke	1%
Cognitive loss	*
Diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease or related forms of dementia	*
None of the above	29%
Prefer not to say	1%



CHANGING HEALTH, CHANGING HABITS

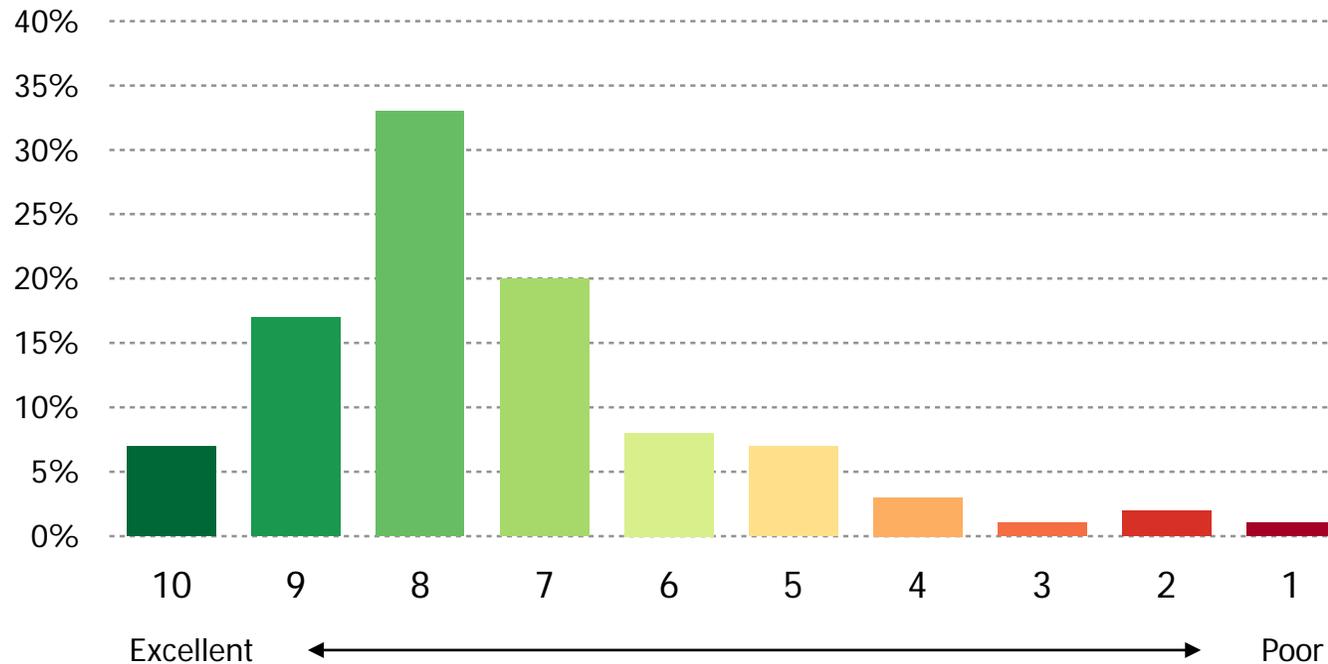
Overall, Americans over 50 feel good about their health, no doubt in large part because of the effort they make to eat a healthy diet. In fact, 6 in 10 say that the healthfulness of their diet has improved over the last 20 years.

At the same time, there is a significant decrease in the amount of physical activity that Americans over 50 get, in comparison to what they were used to 20 years ago, as well as a corresponding decline in having the energy to do the things they want to do.

Americans over 50 Report Good Health

Roughly 6 in 10 rate their health as good (8-10); income and the need for food assistance is strongly linked with health

Self-Reported Health Status



66%

Of those with a college degree rate their health as good (8-10), vs. 53% of those with less than a college degree.

63%

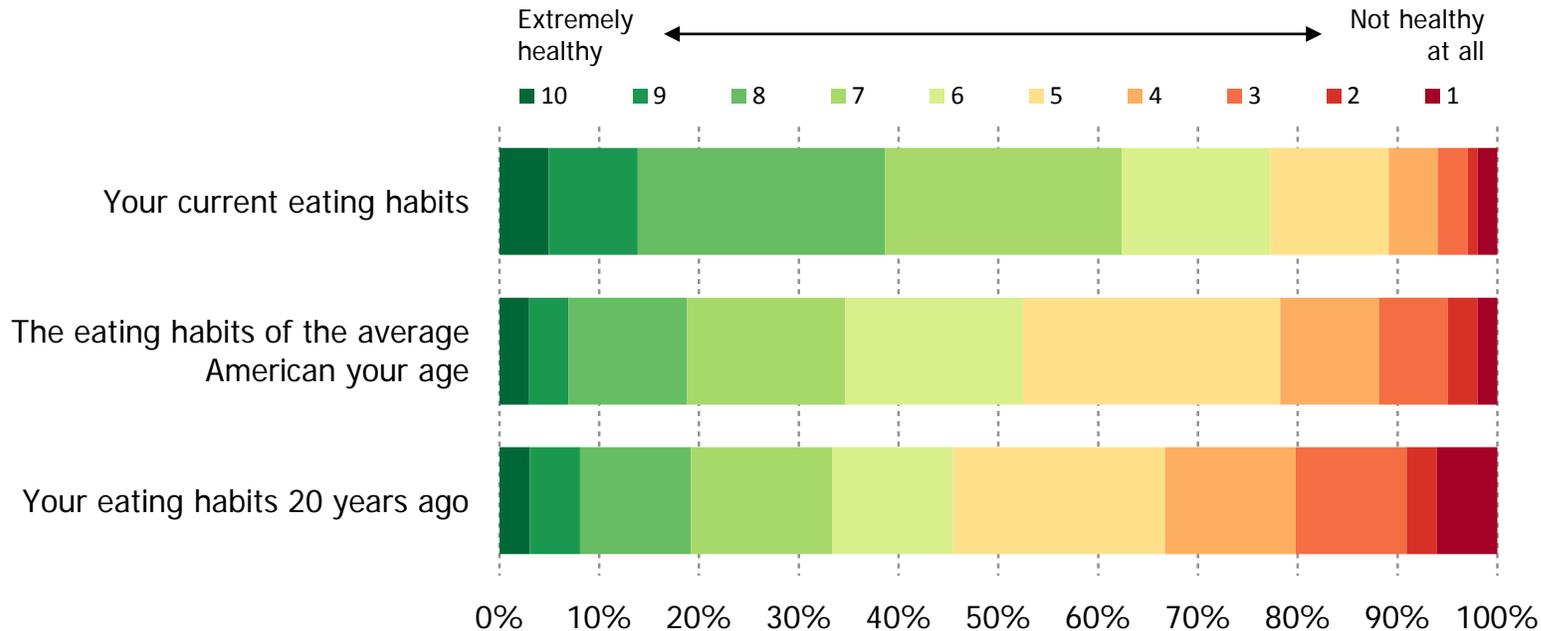
Of those who are married/partnered are more likely to report good health vs. 46% of those who are not married/partnered.

Q1: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "poor" and 10 being "excellent," how would you rate your own health, in general? (n=1,005)

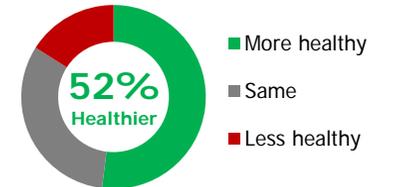
Eating Habits Have Improved for 6 in 10

6 in 10 say their current eating habits are healthier than they were 20 years ago and half consider their diet superior to that of the average American their age

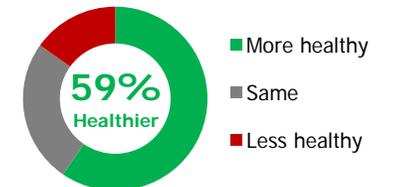
Healthfulness of Eating Habits



Consumer vs. Average American



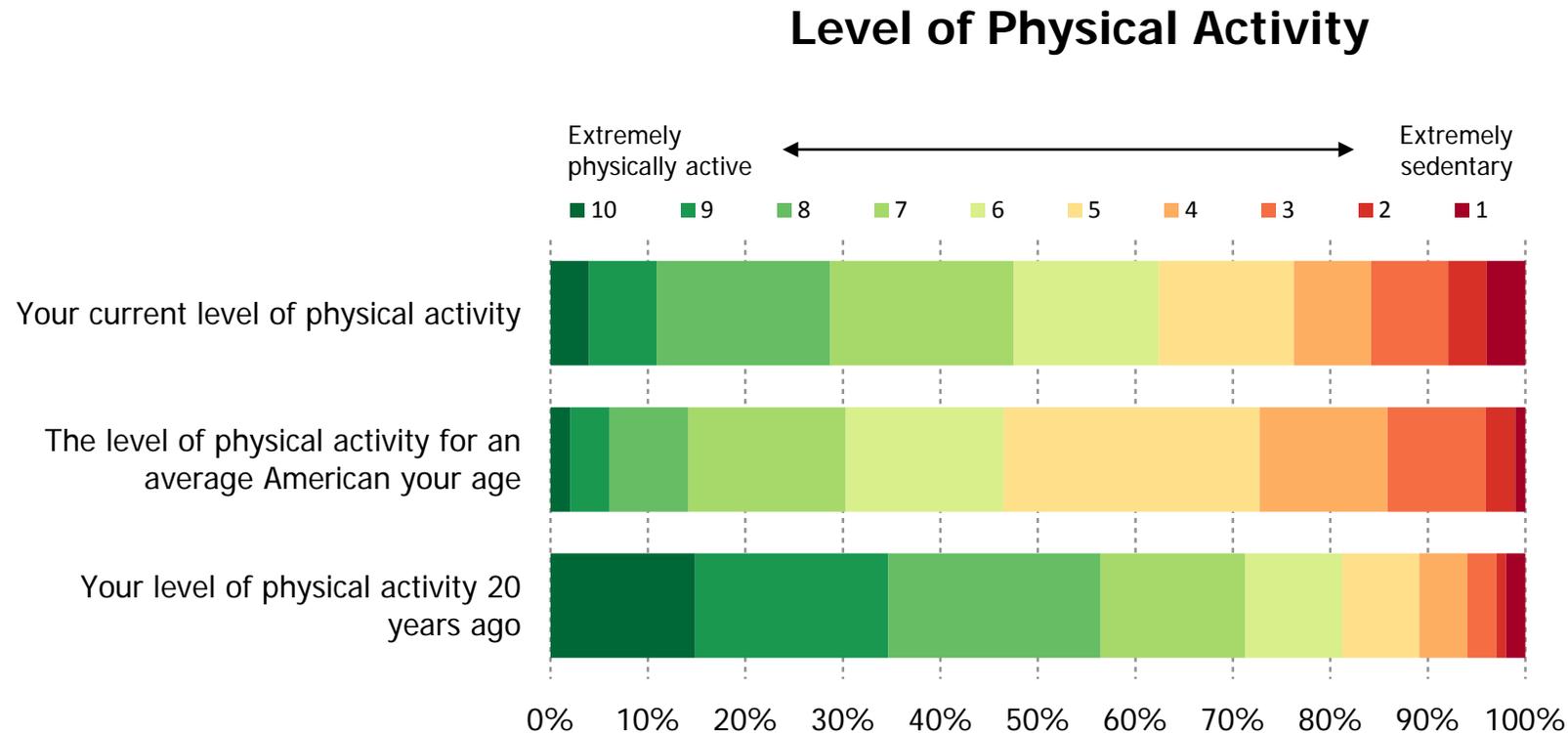
Consumer now vs. 20 years ago



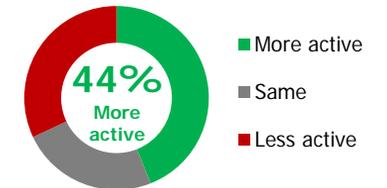
Q2: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "not healthy at all" and 10 being "extremely healthy," how would you rate the following? (n=1,005)

While Diets Improve, Physical Activity Declines

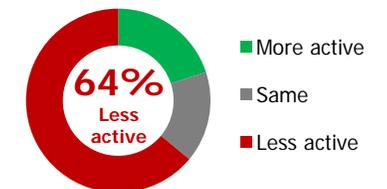
Nearly two-thirds say they were more physically active 20 years ago than they are now; Interestingly, income has no impact on consumers' level of activity earlier in life, but a strong impact on their activity today



Consumer vs. Average American



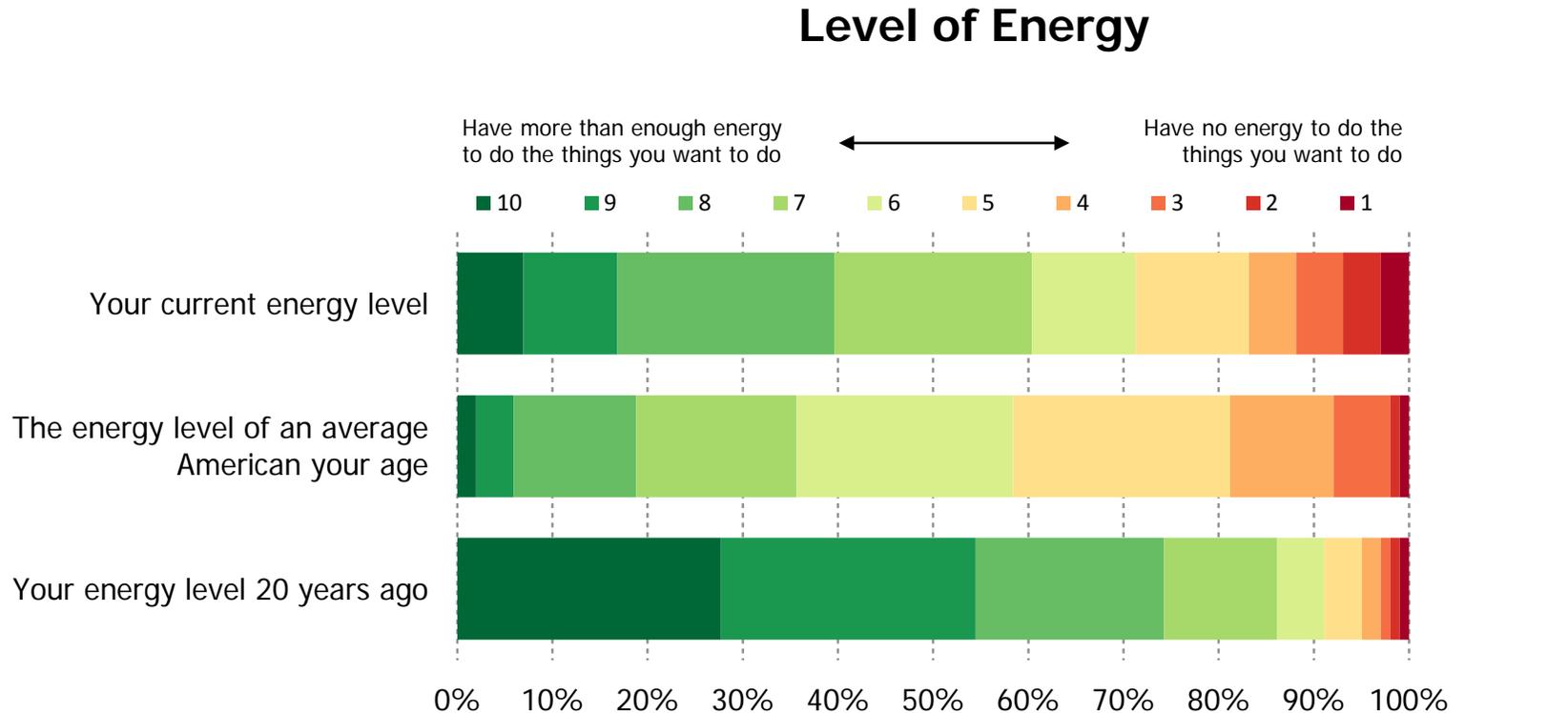
Consumer now vs. 20 years ago



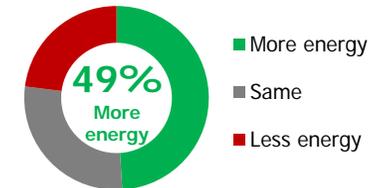
Q3: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "extremely sedentary" and 10 being "extremely physically active," how would you rate the following? (n=1,005)

7 in 10 Have Less Energy vs. 20 Years Ago

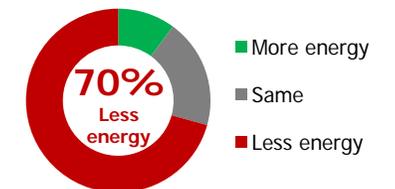
Those with higher income and those who are married or have a partner report higher levels of energy



Consumer vs. Average American



Consumer now vs. 20 years ago

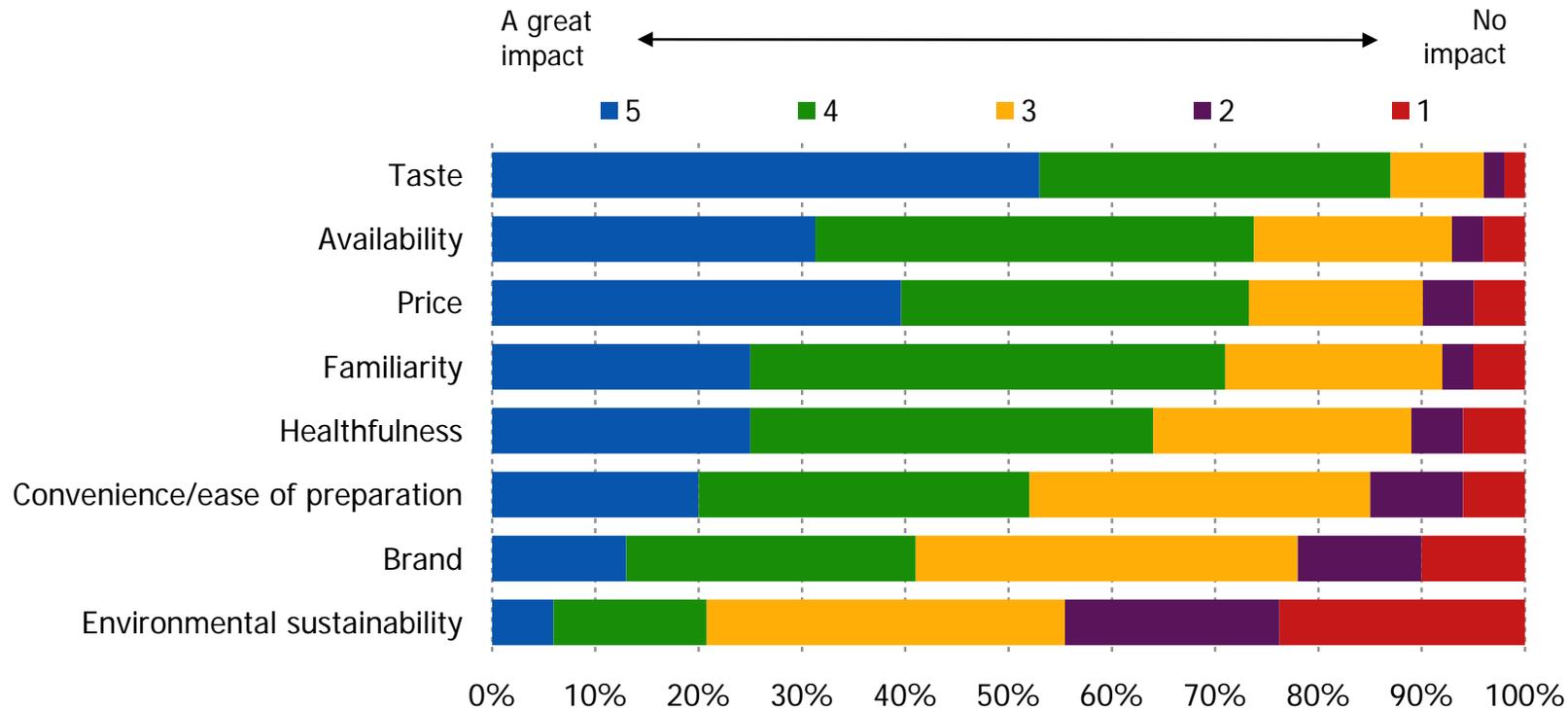


Q4: On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being "have no energy to do the things you want to do" and 10 being "have more than enough energy to do the things you want to do," how would you rate the following? (n=1,005)

Taste Has the Greatest Impact

However, availability, price, and familiarity are also major drivers; familiarity is much more important than brand

Impact on Buying Food and Beverages



Not surprisingly, price has a big impact on those with less income and on those who receive food assistance. Lower income consumers are also more impacted by convenience.

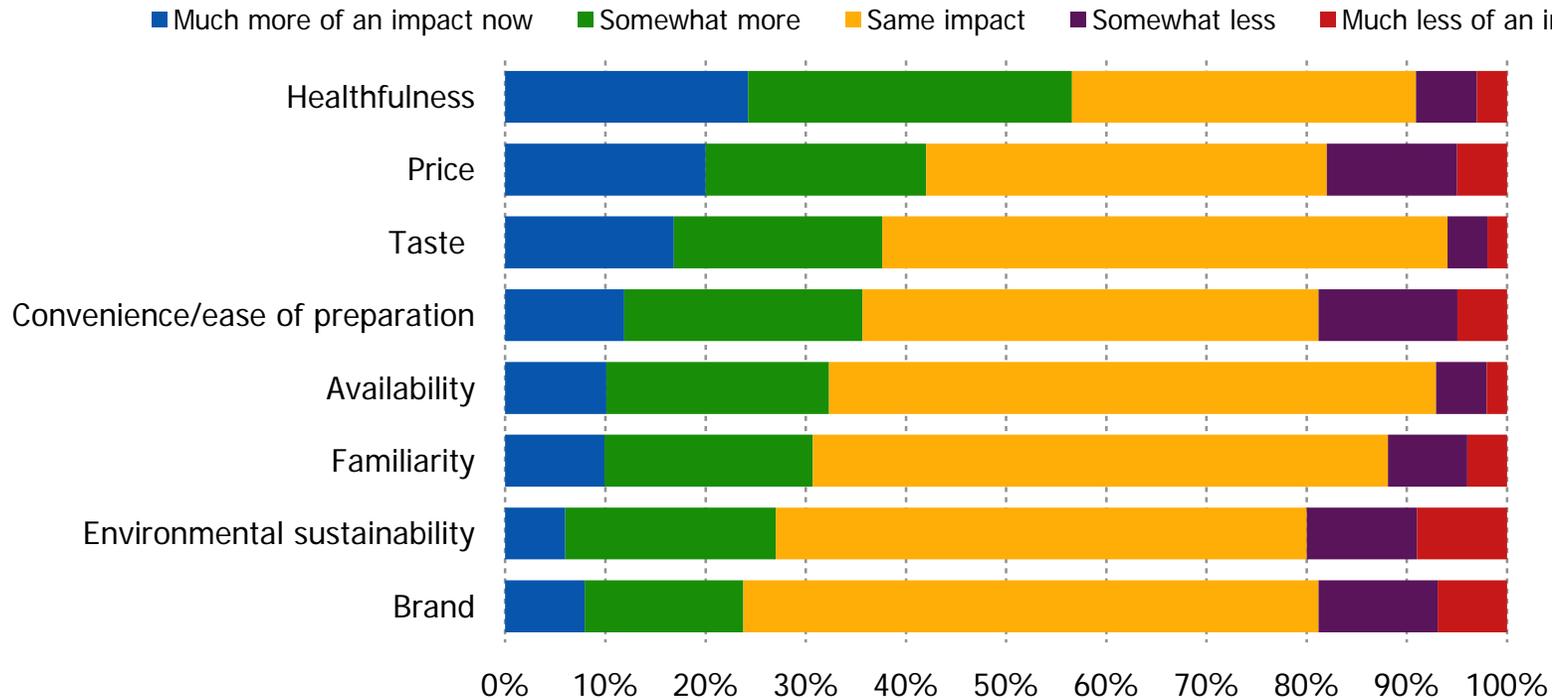
Healthfulness has a big impact on college grads, women, and those with a high level of energy.

Q21: How much of an impact do the following have on your decision to buy foods and beverages? (n=1,005)

Impact of Healthfulness is the Biggest Change

More than half say healthfulness has more of an impact on buying food and beverages compared to 20 years ago

Impact on Buying Food and Beverages Compared to 20 Years Ago



Those in poorer health are more price sensitive now, but not more influenced by healthfulness.

Environmental sustainability is now more impactful on women and college grads.

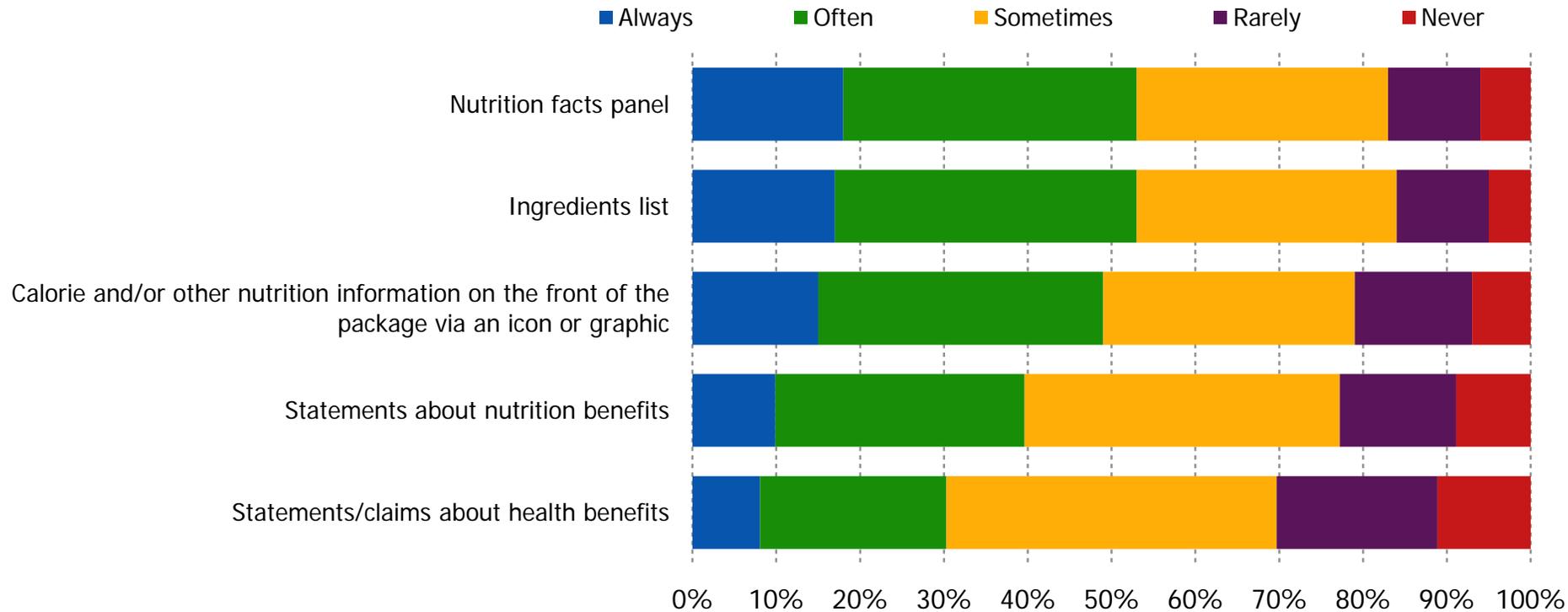
Consumers in their 70s are much more likely to say that taste and convenience now play a bigger role in their decision.

Q22: Compared to 20 years ago, to what extent do the following have more or less of an impact on your decision to buy foods and beverages than they did when you were younger? (n=1,005)

Half Consult the NFP and Ingredients Lists

Statements about nutrition benefits and health benefits receive less attention

Packaging Information Consulted



Women and those with more energy pay closer attention to packaging information than their counterparts.

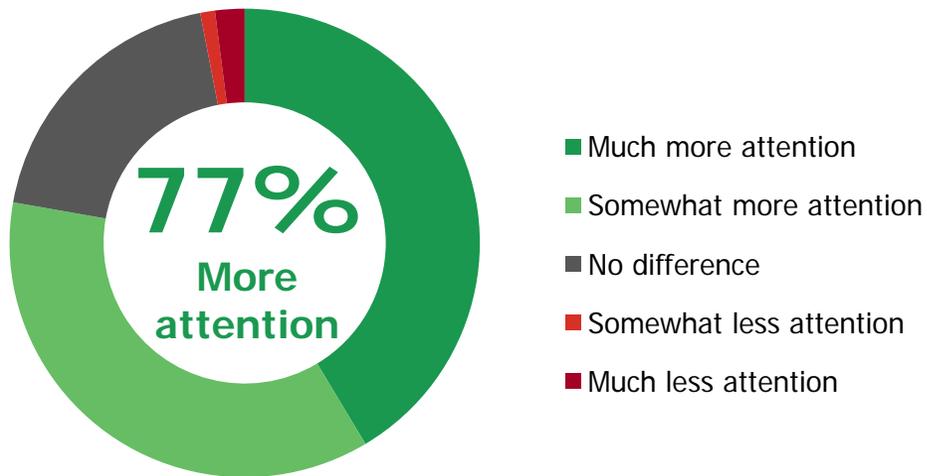
Higher income consumers are more likely to look at the NFP, ingredients list, and calorie/nutrition info.

Q24: How often do you consult the following packaging information before deciding to purchase a food or beverage? (n=1,005)

3 in 4 are Paying More Attention to Labels

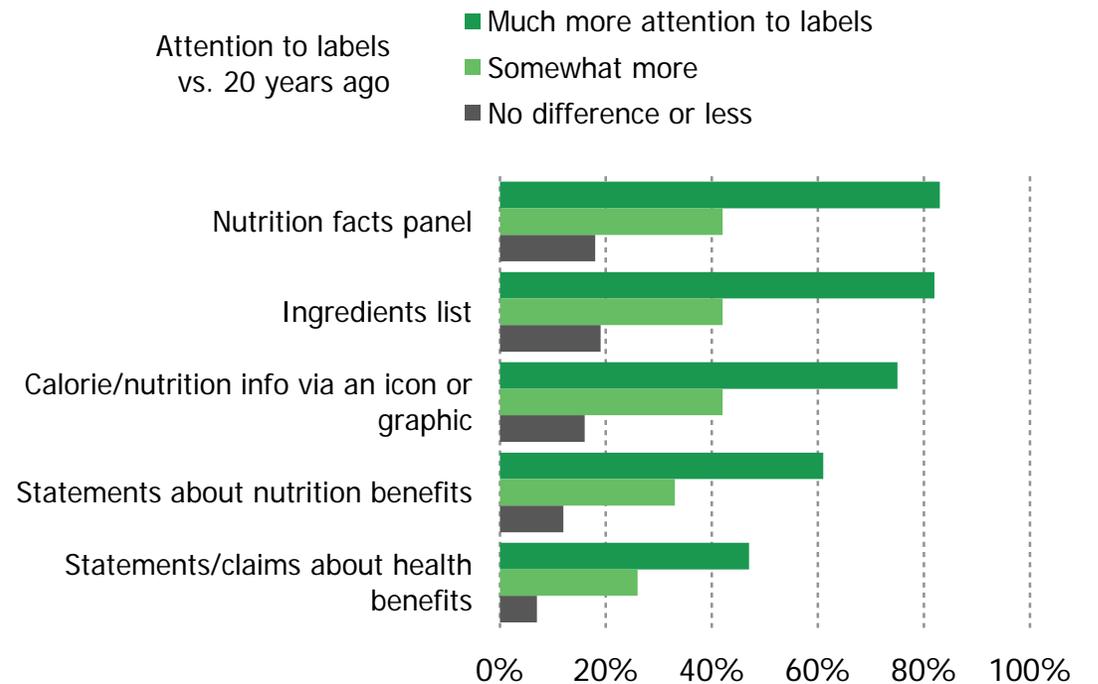
8 in 10 of those who pay much more attention to labels now regularly consult the NFP and ingredients list

Level of Attention to Nutrition Labels Compared to 20 Years Ago



Women and those with higher income and education are more likely to pay more attention to labels now.

Packaging Information Consulted (% Always/Often)



Q23: Compared to 20 years ago, do you pay more or less attention to nutrition labels on food? (n=1,005)
 Q24: How often do you consult the following packaging information before deciding to purchase a food or beverage? (n=1,005)



HEALTHY EATING, HEALTHY OUTCOMES

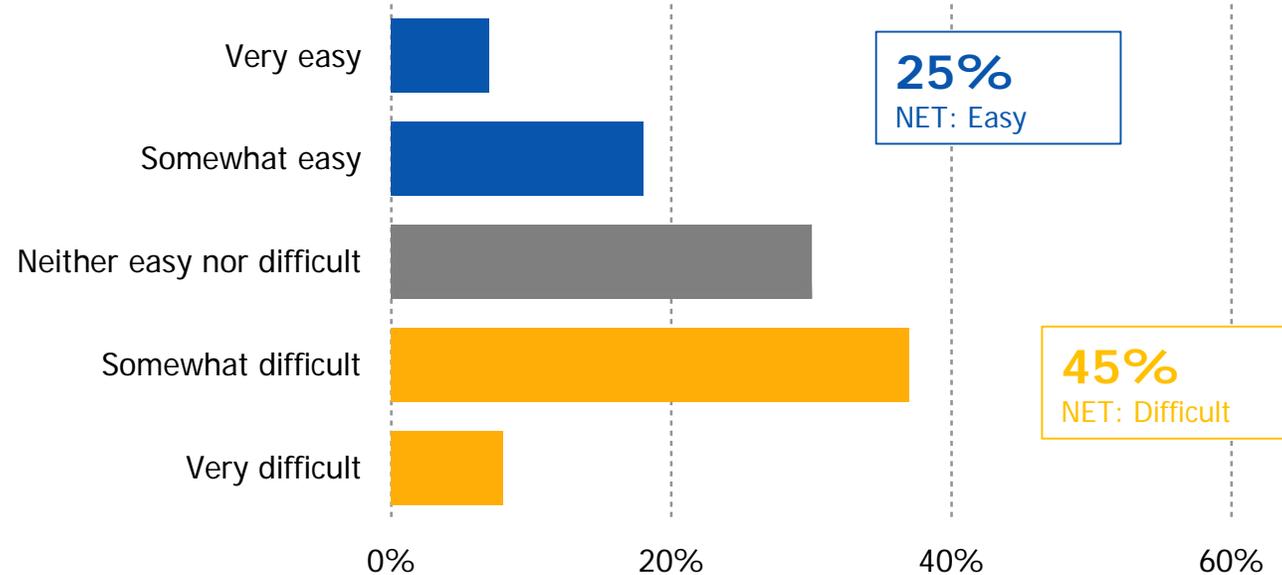
Americans over 50 believe they have a good understanding of nutrition requirements and for many, nutrition requirements mean something new to them now that they are over 50. This is a sensible belief, but it also highlights a perceived disconnect with official recommendations geared towards an “average healthy adult.”

While healthy eating may not always be adhered to, Americans over 50 do make an effort and often do so with an eye towards long-term health and preventing future health conditions. Cardiovascular health is seen as most important, with muscle health/mobility, energy, and brain function also seen as key health motivators.

For Many, Healthy Eating is Not Easy

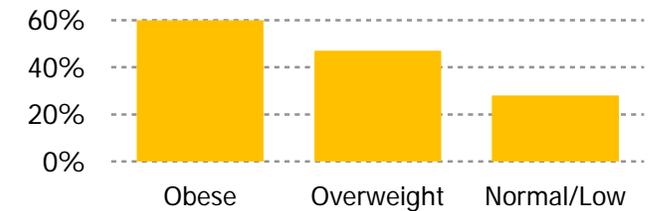
45% say it is difficult to eat a healthy diet, while only a quarter find it at least somewhat easy to do

Level of Difficulty to Eating Healthy



Those who receive food assistance, those who have a high BMI, and those with less energy find it more difficult to eat healthy.

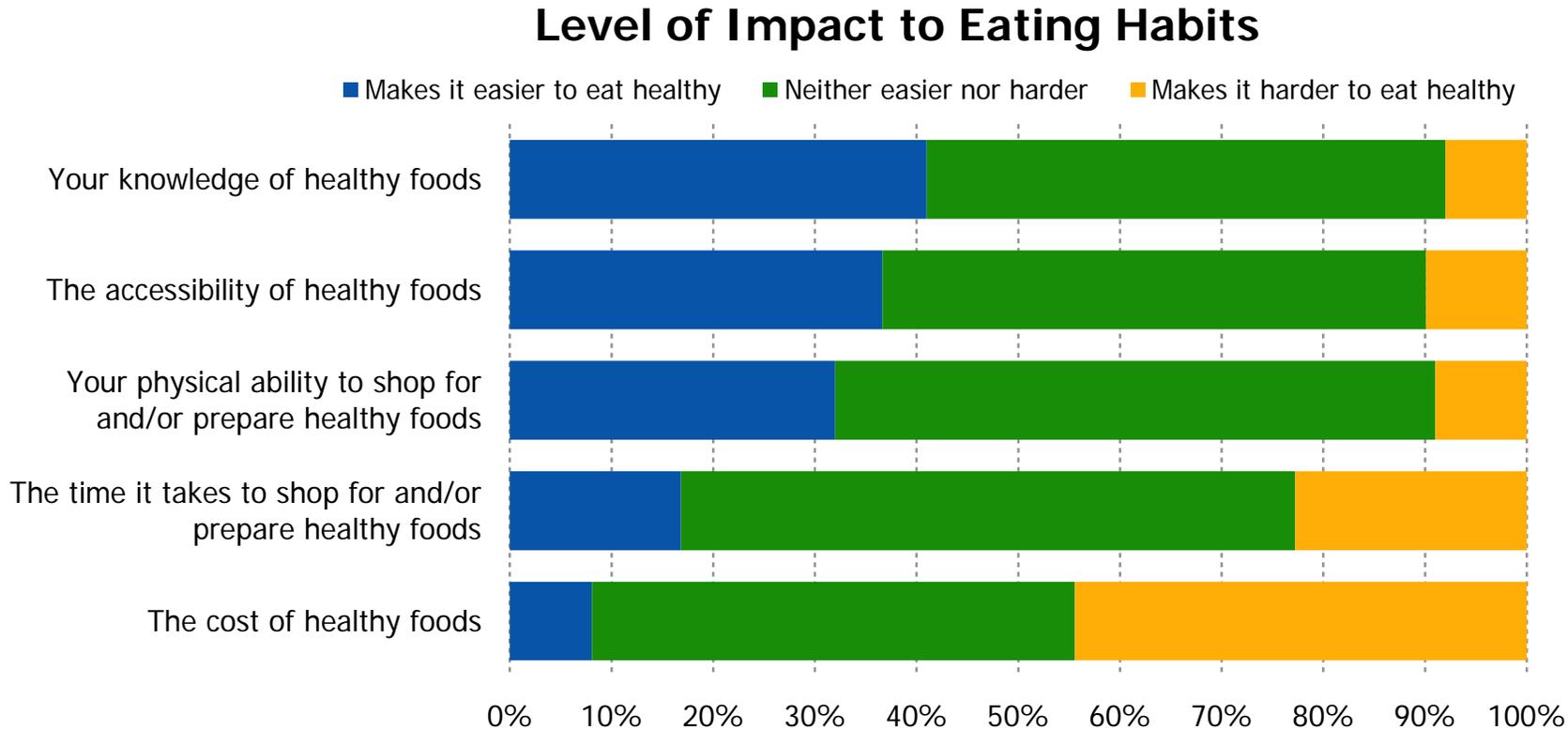
% Difficult by BMI



Q8: How difficult is it for you personally to eat a healthy diet? (n=1,005)

Knowledge helps 4 in 10 eat healthier

Accessibility and physical ability are the two other biggest facilitators that help Americans over 50 eat healthy



Other than cost, all of the following make it easier for women, those in better health, and those who have high energy to eat healthy.

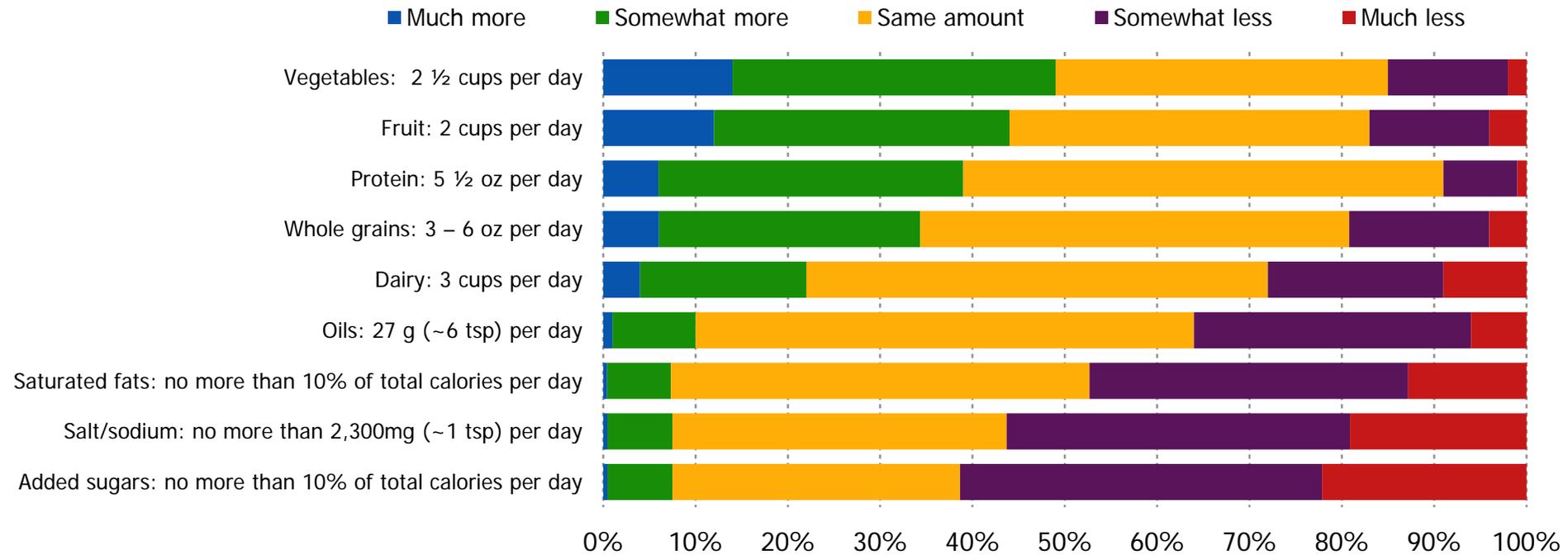
Those with low income are more likely to see all following, especially cost as making it more difficult.

Q9: How do each of the following impact your eating habits? (n=1,005)

Americans over 50 Often See Difference in Needs

While Americans over 50 may see their needs as distinct from the average healthy adult, there is little difference in perceived needs across demographics and health within this age group

Perceived Food Group Needs of Americans over 50 vs. Recommended Amount for Average Healthy Adult

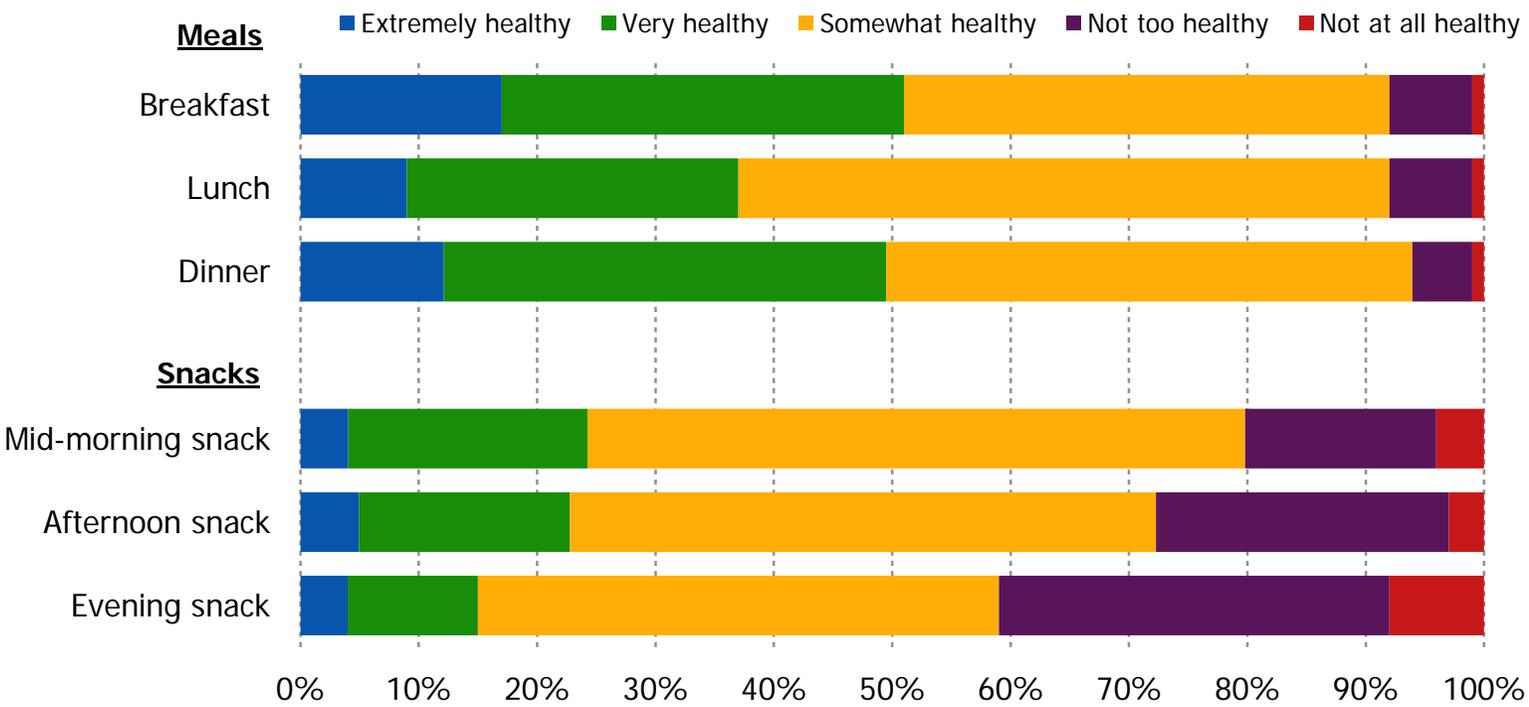


Q5: The USDA recommends the following amounts of each food group per day for the average healthy adult. Based on your current age, do you think you personally need more, less, or the same amount in order to stay healthy? (n=1,005)

Breakfast and Dinner are the Healthiest Meals

Half eat a very or extremely healthy breakfast and dinner; Few eat healthy snacks

Healthy Meals and Snacks



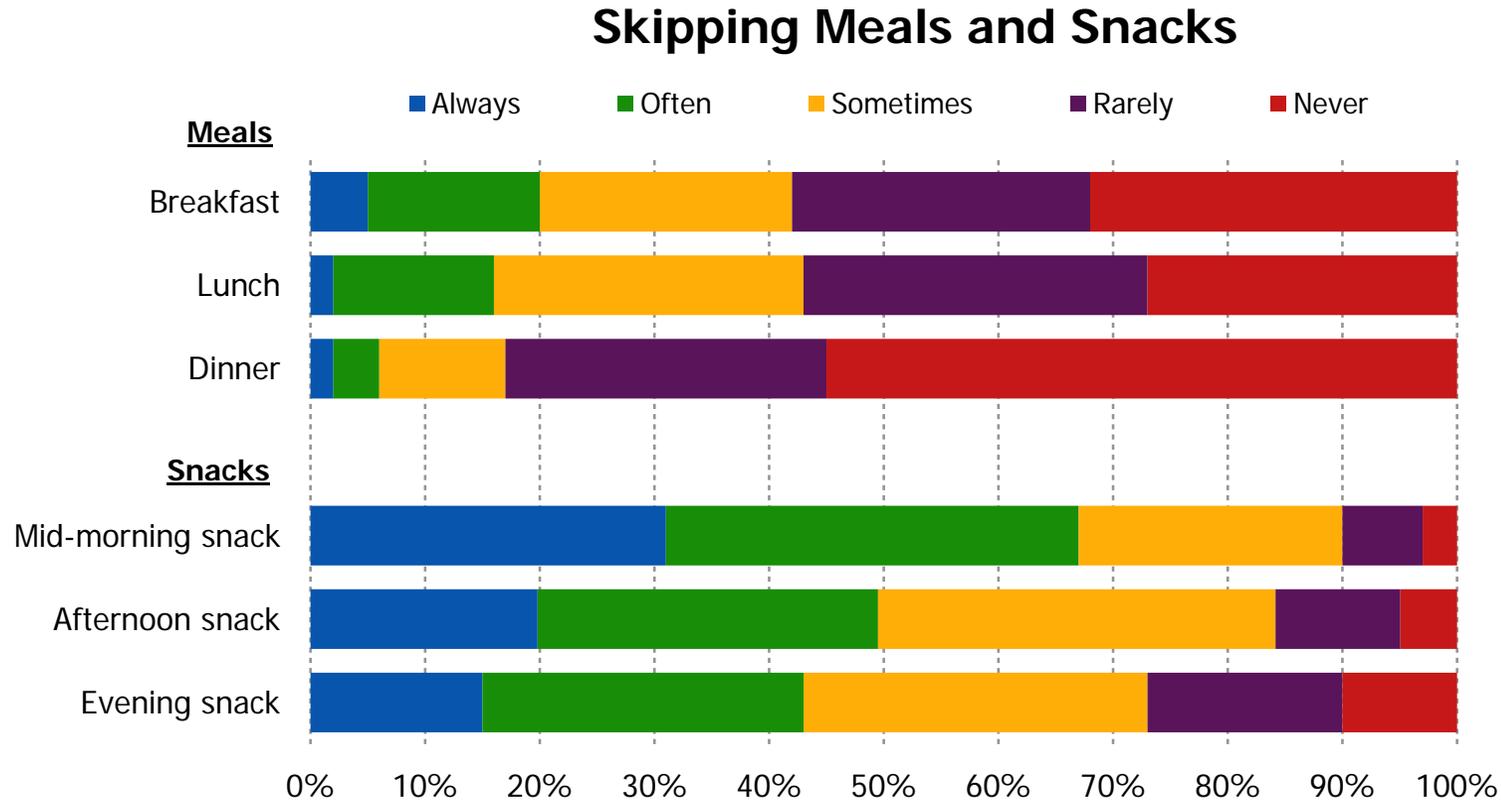
56%
Of those with higher income typically eat a healthy breakfast, vs. 45% of those with low income.

Similarly, those with a college degree, those who are married/partnered, and those who live in an urban area are more likely than their counterparts to eat a healthy breakfast.

Q29: How healthy is the meal/snack you typically consume when you do eat the following? (n=1,005)*
*Note: not asked of those who responded "always skipped"

Americans over 50 Often Skip Snacks

Breakfast is skipped more than any other meal (20% vs. 16% lunch and 5% dinner); Skipping breakfast is linked with having lower levels of energy



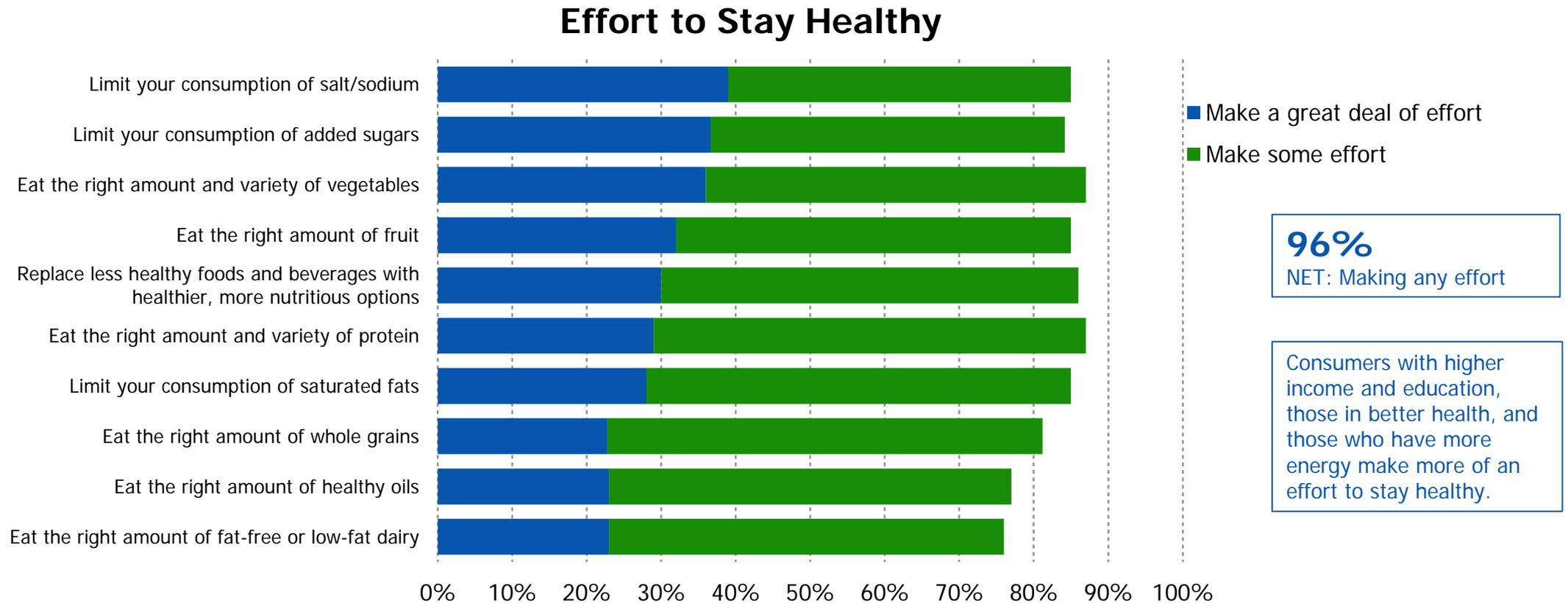
26%
Of those with a high BMI often skip breakfast, vs. just 15% of those at a healthier BMI.

26%
Of those who have low levels of energy often skip breakfast, vs. 13% of those with high levels.

Q28: How often do you skip each of the following meals/snacks? (n=1,005)

Americans over 50 Make an Effort to Stay Healthy

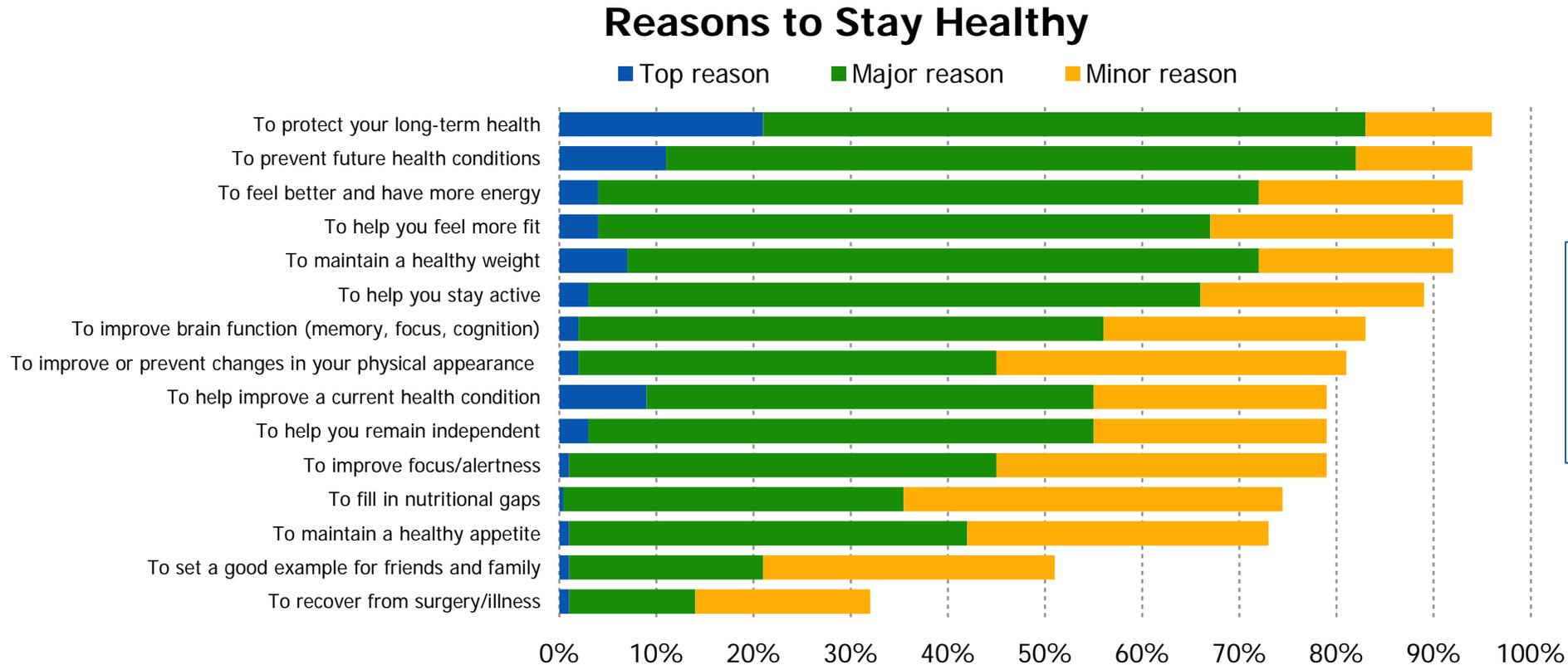
Eating the right amount and variety vegetables tops the list, along with protein



Q6: To what extent do you make an effort to do the following to stay healthy? (n=1,005)

Vast Majority Seek to Protect Long-Term Health

More than 8 in 10 say protecting long-term health and preventing future health conditions are major/top reasons why they eat healthy; 2 in 10 say protecting long-term health is their primary reason



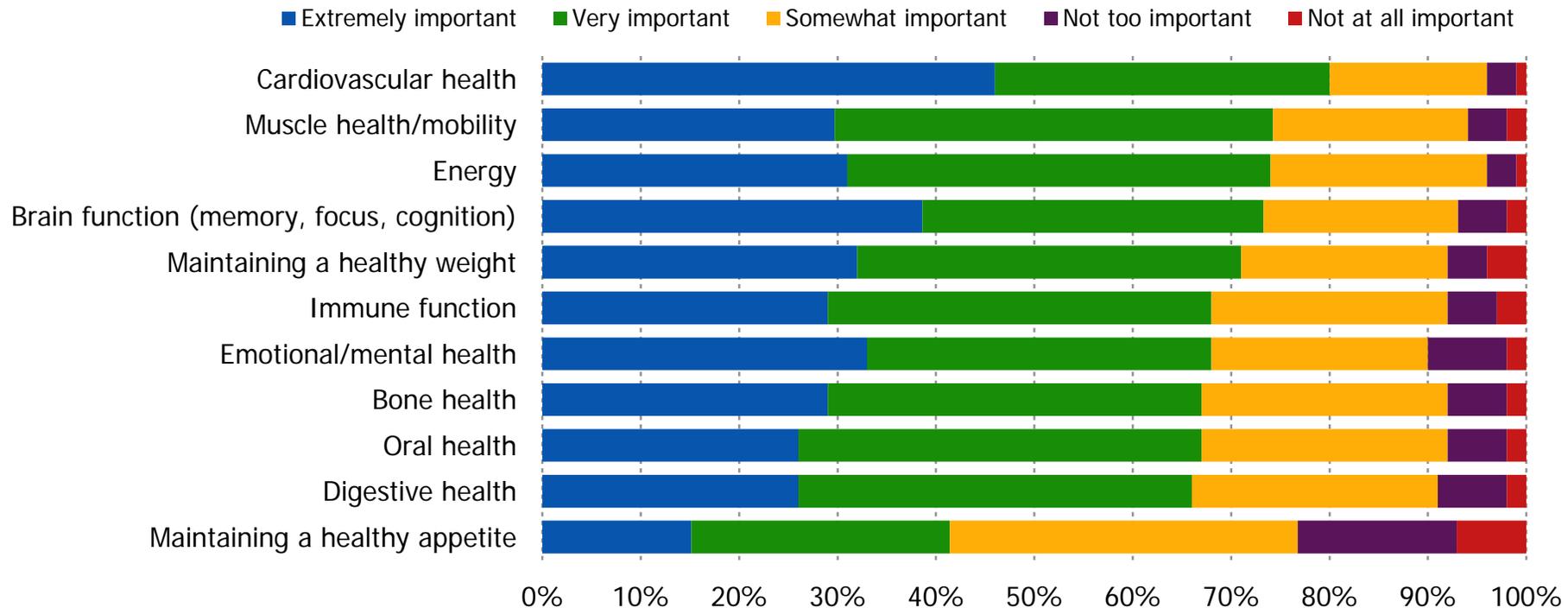
Those with higher income and education and those who are married/partnered are more likely to find these all to be reasons to stay healthy.

Q7: Which of the following are reasons why you make an effort to eat this way? (Of those making an effort to stay healthy, n=977)

Americans over 50 See Many Topics as Important

Nearly half find cardiovascular health to be extremely important; Mobility, energy, and brain function are also topics of significance

Health Topic Importance



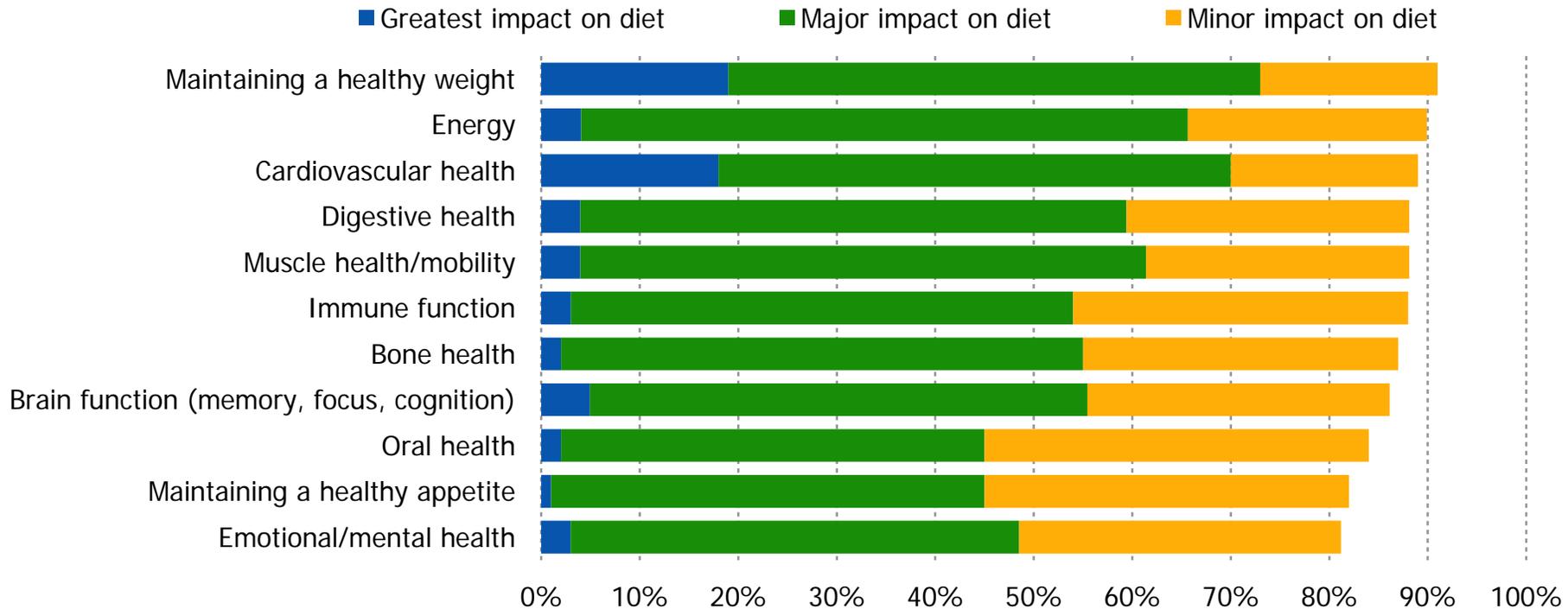
While those in better health see nearly all of these topics as more important than their counterparts in poorer health, the same is not true across BMI.

Q10: How important are the following health topics to you currently? (n=1,005)

Weight and Heart Health Make Greatest Impact

While weight is much less important than cardiovascular health to Americans over 50 overall, it has a significant impact on the diet of those who do see it as important; Energy is unlikely to be the top impact, but is a major driver nonetheless

Impact of Topic on Diet/Food Choices
(Of those who see some importance in each)



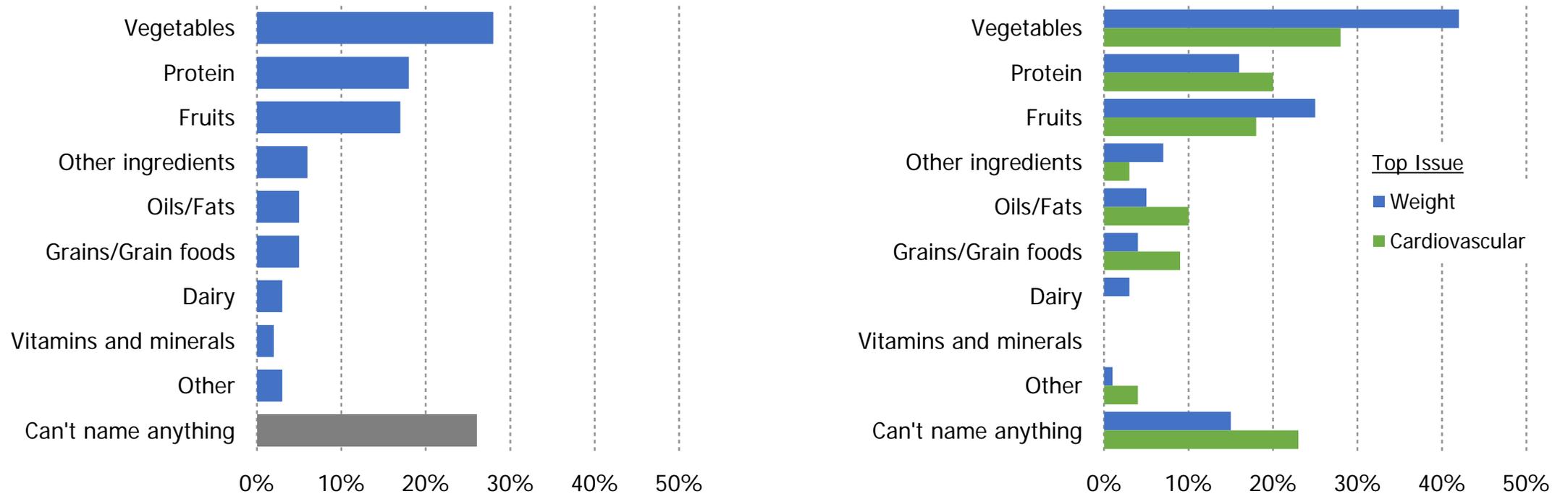
Nearly all of the health topics have more of an impact on the diet and food choices of women and those with a college degree when compared to their counterparts.

Q11: Which of the following health topics currently have an impact on your diet/food choices? (n=1,005)*
 *Note: only asked of those who answered very or somewhat important

Vegetables Most Often Sought Due to Health

Although consumers had already indicated that a health issue has a significant impact on their diet, a quarter can't name a food they seek because of it; Those focused on weight are more likely to seek veggies and fruits

Foods and Nutrients Sought Due to Top Health Issue

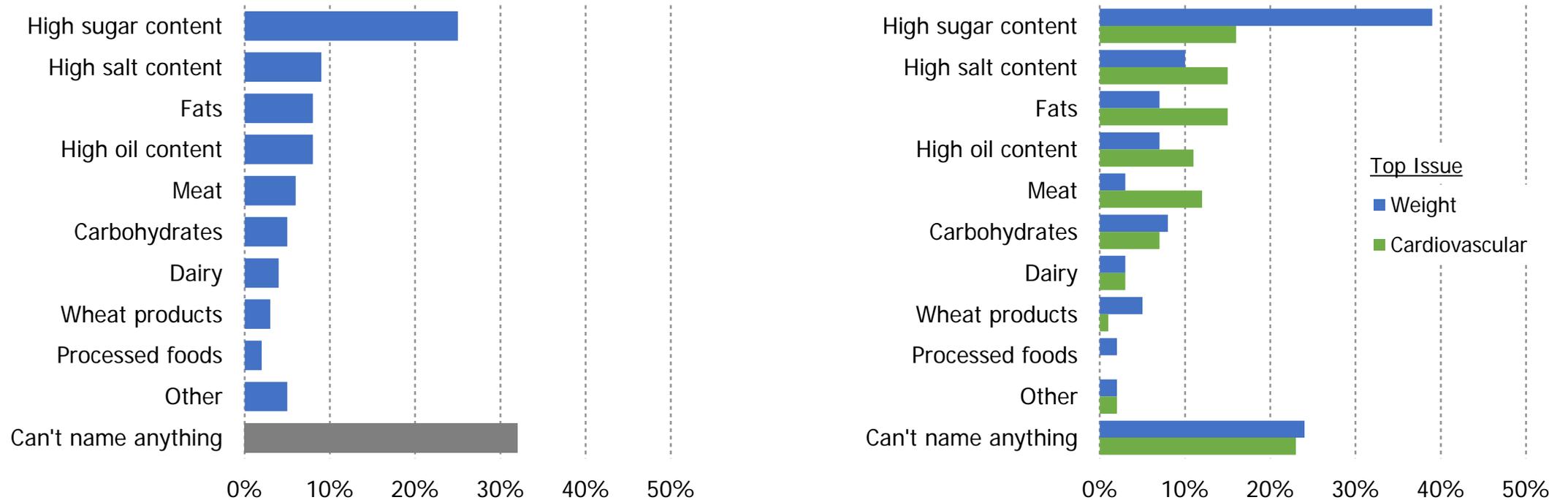


Q13: Can you name a specific food or nutrient that you seek out or eat more of as a result of your concern about [TOP HEALTH ISSUE]? (Of those who selected top issue, n=611)

One-Quarter Avoid Sugar Due to Health Issue

Although consumers had already indicated that a health issue has a significant impact on their diet, one-third can't name a food they avoid because of it; Those focused on weight are especially likely to target sugars

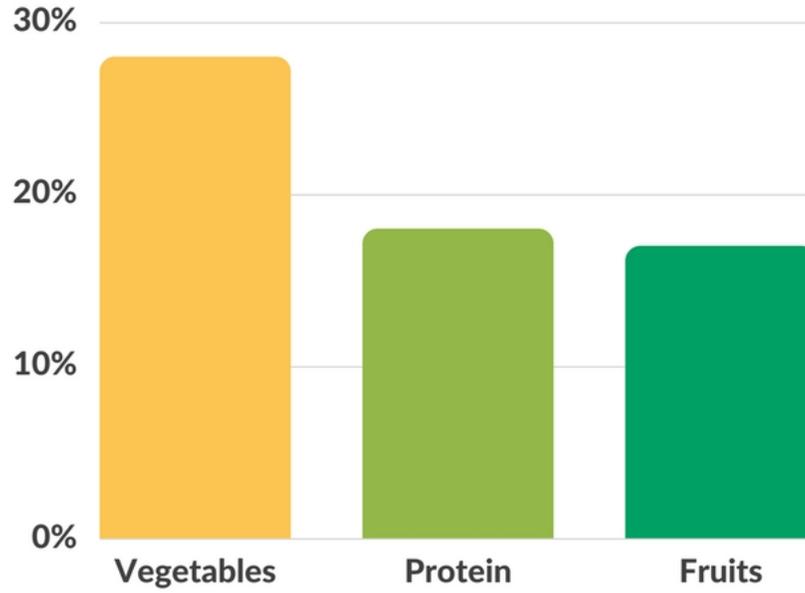
Foods Avoided Due to Top Health Issue



Q12: Can you name a specific food or nutrient that you avoid or limit as a result of your concern about [TOP HEALTH ISSUE]? (Of those who selected top issue, n=611)



PROTEIN SPOTLIGHT



Protein is the second most sought after food or nutrient to help with specific health issues, after vegetables

87%

try to eat the right amount and variety of **protein**

39%

believe they need more **protein** than the average American their age



PURCHASING BEHAVIOR

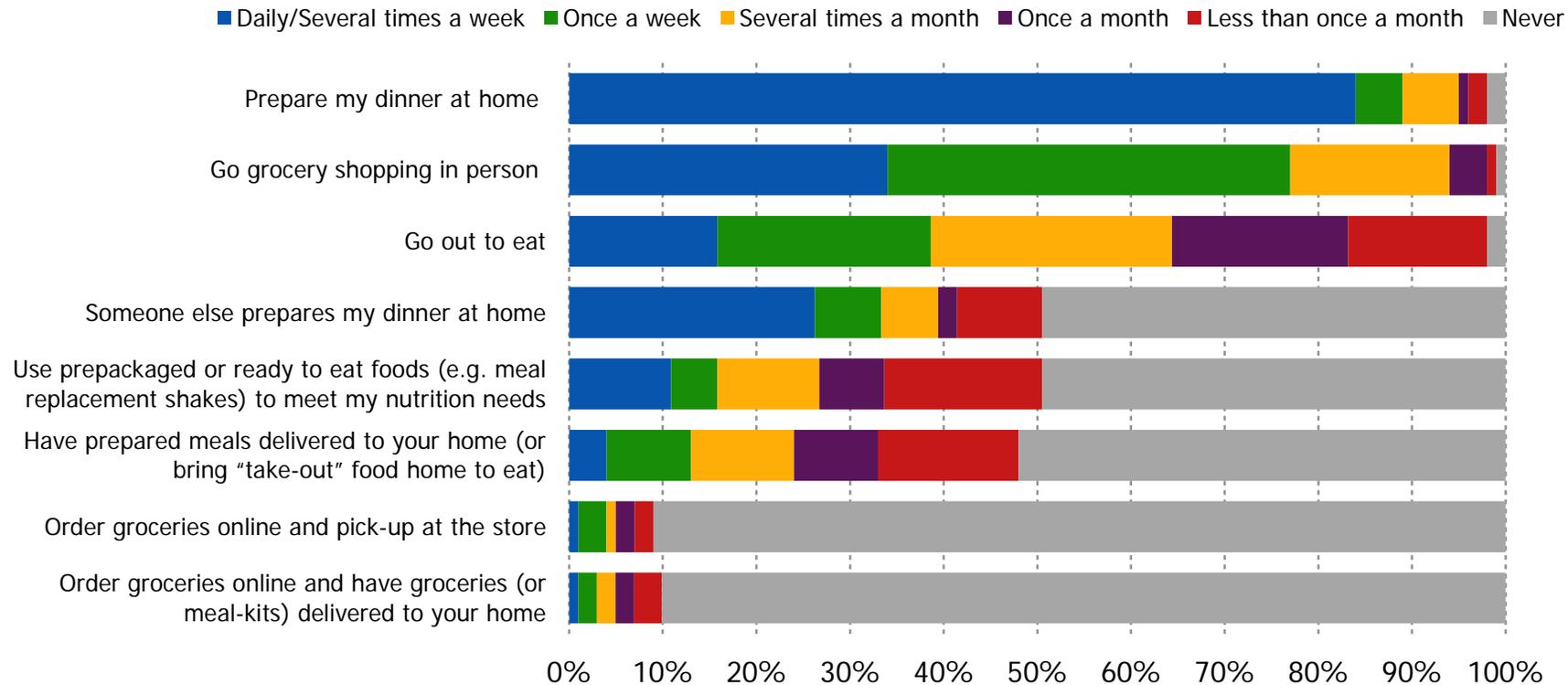
In terms of drivers of food purchasing, taste is the clear top priority, although price and availability are also influential. However, the influence of healthfulness is the biggest mover as consumers age: nearly 6 in 10 say it has more of an impact now than it did for them 20 years ago. Americans over 50 also admit that they are paying more attention to nutrition labels on food than they did when they were younger.

While technology may be starting to exert an influence on consumer food purchasing habits, only 1 in 5 Americans over 50 say this is true for them. In-store shopping still dominates and online grocery ordering and meal kits are relatively rare. Still, for those 1 in 5 who are impacted by technology, three-quarters say technology has made it easier to eat healthy.

Few Order Groceries or Meal-kits Online

3 in 4 go grocery shopping in person at least once a week

Frequency of Food Shopping and Preparation



91%

Of those with higher income (\$75K+) go out to eat at least once a month, vs. 67% of those with lower income (<\$35K).

Interestingly, those with a higher BMI go out to eat more, yet the same is also true of those in better health overall.

45%

Of those in their 50s use prepackaged foods for nutrition at least monthly, vs. just a quarter of those age 60+.

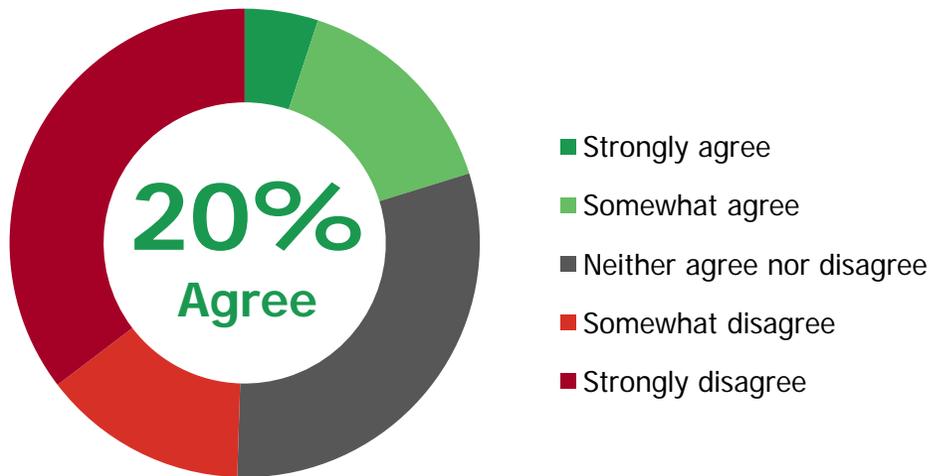
Q17: How frequently, if ever, do you do the following? (n=1,005)

Technology Impacts Purchasing for 1 in 5

For 3 in 4 of those impacted, technology has made it easy to eat healthy

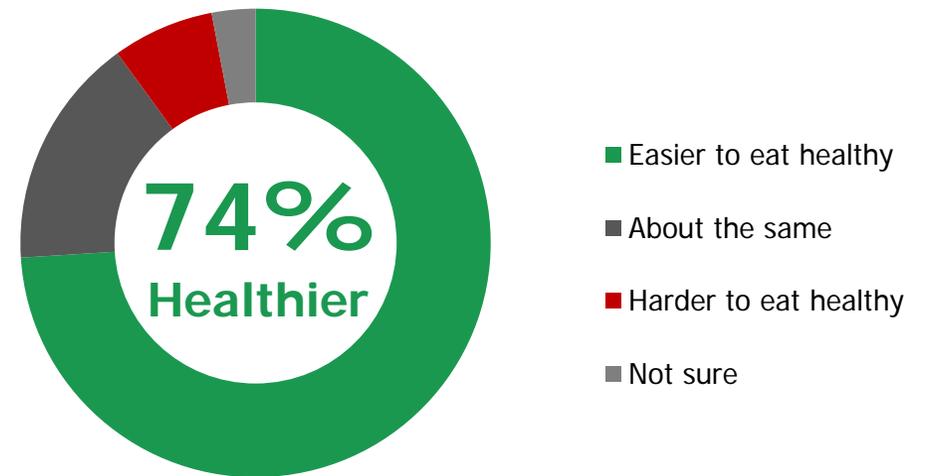
Agree/Disagree:

Technology (such as smartphone apps and online shopping) has had an impact on the way I purchase food



Consumers with higher income and education and those in their 50s are more likely to have felt an impact from technology.

If Impacted by Technology: Is Impact Positive or Negative



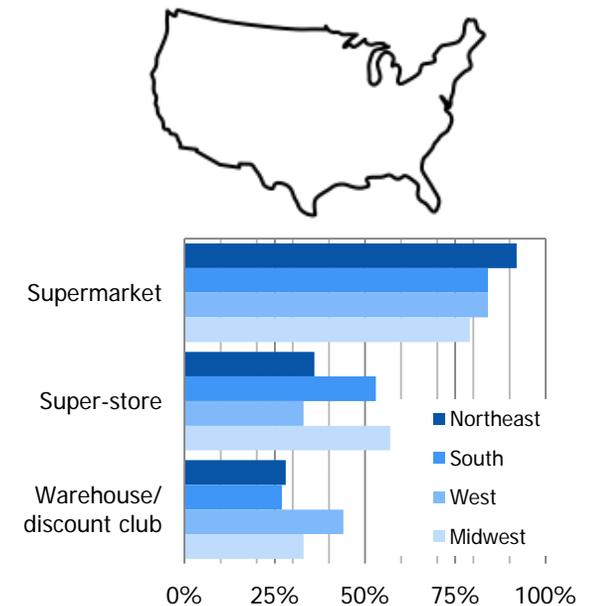
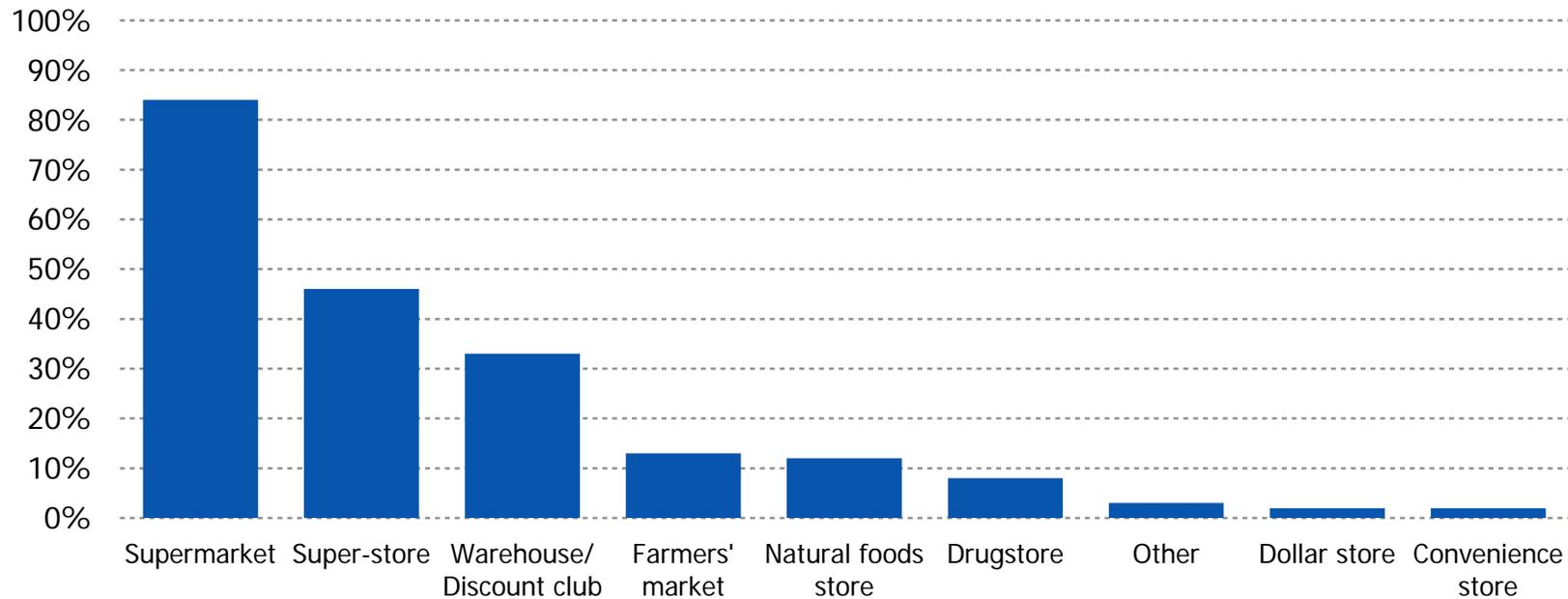
Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (n=1,005)

Q27: Earlier you mentioned that technology has had an impact on the way you purchase food. Would you say that technology has made it...? (TECHNOLOGY HAS IMPACT ON PURCHASING FOOD, n=209)

Most Americans over 50 Shop at Supermarkets

Super-stores are more frequented in the South and Midwest, in small towns and rural areas, and by those with lower income; Warehouse/discount clubs meanwhile are more common in the West and the suburbs, and by higher income married couples

Where Americans over 50 Regularly Grocery Shop

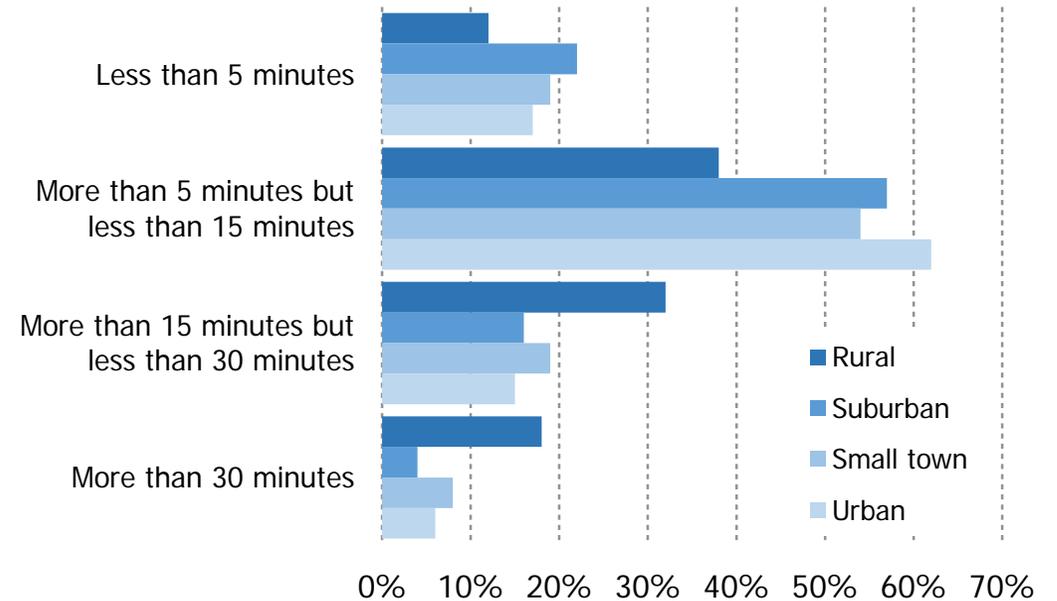
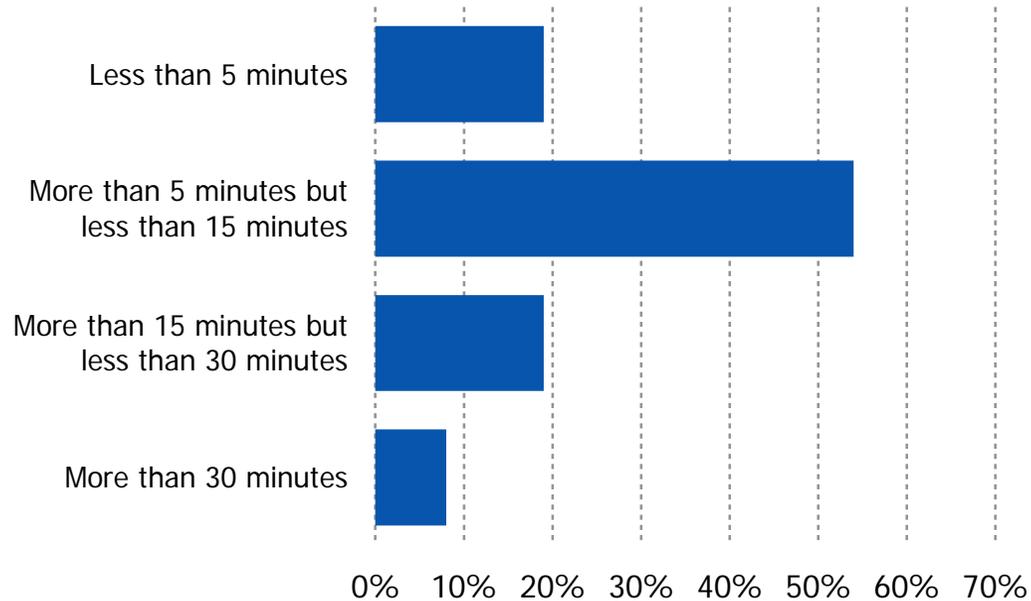


Q18: When you go grocery shopping in person, which best describes where you regularly go to? Please select all that apply, but only those that you regularly go to (Grocery shops in person, n=997)

Grocery Stores are Often in Close Proximity

3 in 4 go to grocery stores less than 15 minutes away, although those in rural areas have to travel farther; Those with higher BMI also report having to travel farther to shop for groceries

Distance to Grocery Stores

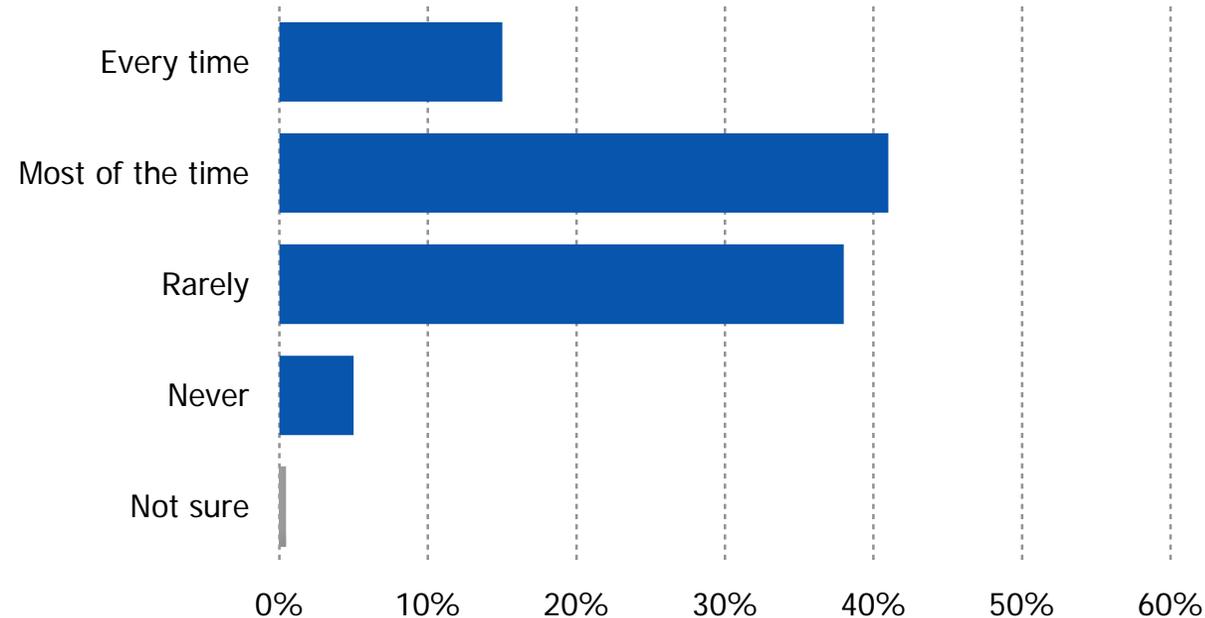


Q19: Thinking about when you go grocery shopping in person, about how long does it take you to get there? (Grocery shops in person, n=997)

More than Half Use Coupons Regularly

Interestingly, coupon usage doesn't differ by income level – all groups look to save money at the store

Use of Coupons/Sales Promotions



62%

Women are more likely to use coupons regularly (62% vs. 51% men).

59%

Of those who are married/partnered use coupons regularly, vs. 50% who are not.

Q20: How often, if ever, do you use coupons or sales promotions when buying groceries? (Grocery shops, n=998)



KEY MOTIVATORS

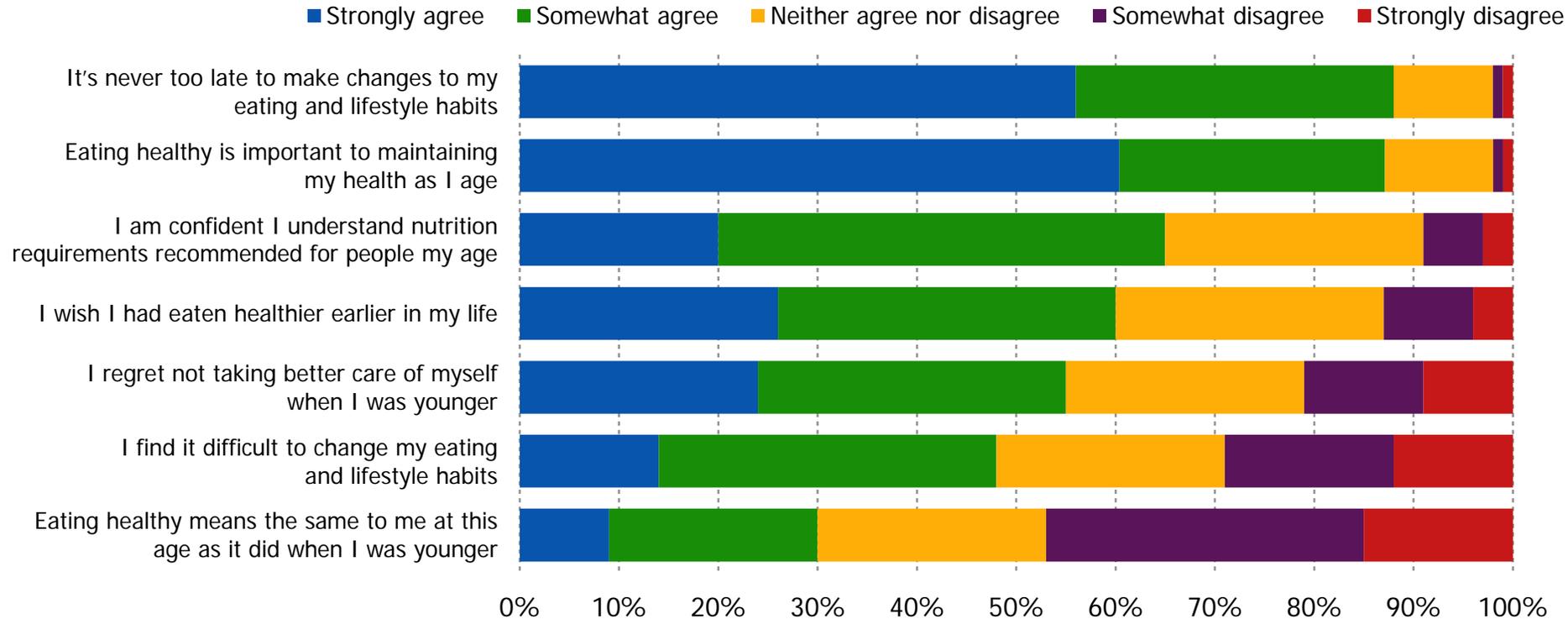
While the news and family and friends are the most common sources of nutrition information for Americans over 50, one's own personal healthcare professional is most likely to be the primary source.

For crafting messages that resonate with Americans over 50 and motivate this group to eat healthy, there is a clear take-away: highlight the improvement to life, not just the improvement to longevity. Emotional appeals that reference the impact that a balanced diet can have on quality of life surpasses the impact of a fact-based message.

9 in 10 Agree: Never Too Late to Make Changes

A similar share agree that eating healthy is important to maintaining their health as they age; Few agree that eating healthy means the same now as it did when they were younger

Agreement of Health Statements



Those with less than a college degree, those with less energy, and those with a high BMI wish they had eaten healthier earlier and regret not taking better care of themselves.

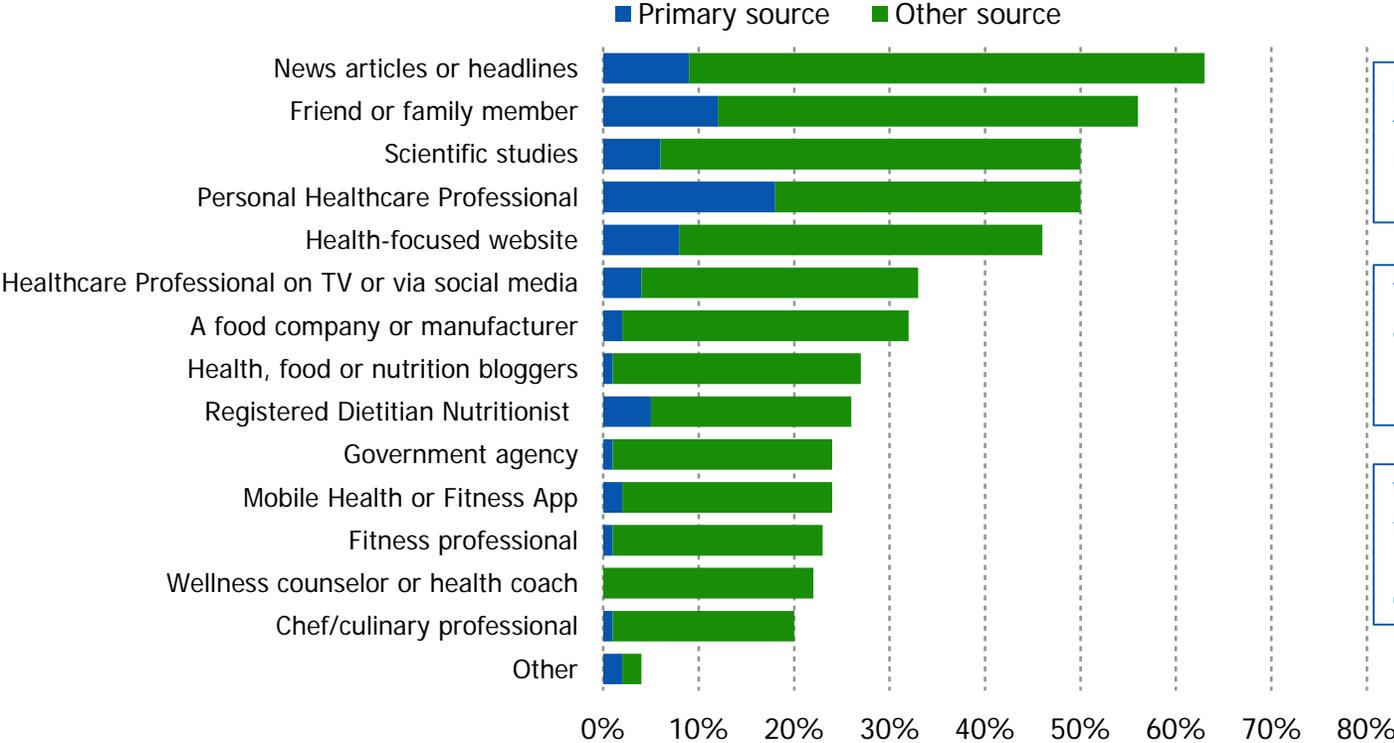
70%
Of women are confident that they understand the nutrition requirements recommended, vs. 59% of men.

Q16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (n=1,005)

News and Family are Most Common Sources

However, one's own personal healthcare professional is most likely to be the primary source of nutrition information

Sources for Information About Nutrition and Food Choices



Men are more likely to consider a friend or family member a primary source of information (16% vs. 9%), although a doctor is still the most common primary source.

Those in better health and with a lower BMI are more likely to get information from the news and scientific studies. Those in poorer health are more reliant on their doctor.

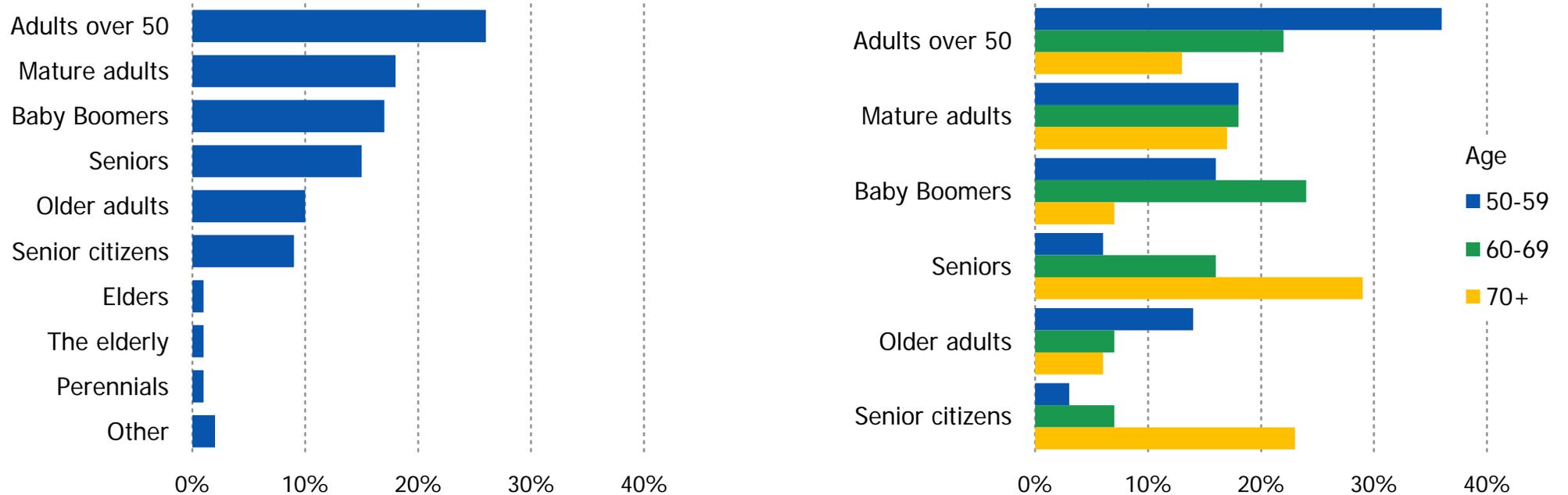
Those with higher income and education and those who are married are more likely to get information from several of these sources, especially the more common sources overall.

Q14: Which of the following do you use as sources of information about nutrition and food choices? (n=1,005)

Label Preference Greatly Dependent on Age

Those in their 50s prefer to be described as "adults over 50," while "seniors" and "senior citizens" are popular among those 70+

Preferred Name for People Over 50



Q25: Which of the following names for people age 50 and older do you prefer? (n=1,005)

An Appeal to Quality of Life is Highly Motivating

Motivational messages were tested on randomly chosen subsets of consumers; the clear favorite was the message which made an appeal to improving one's quality of life late in life

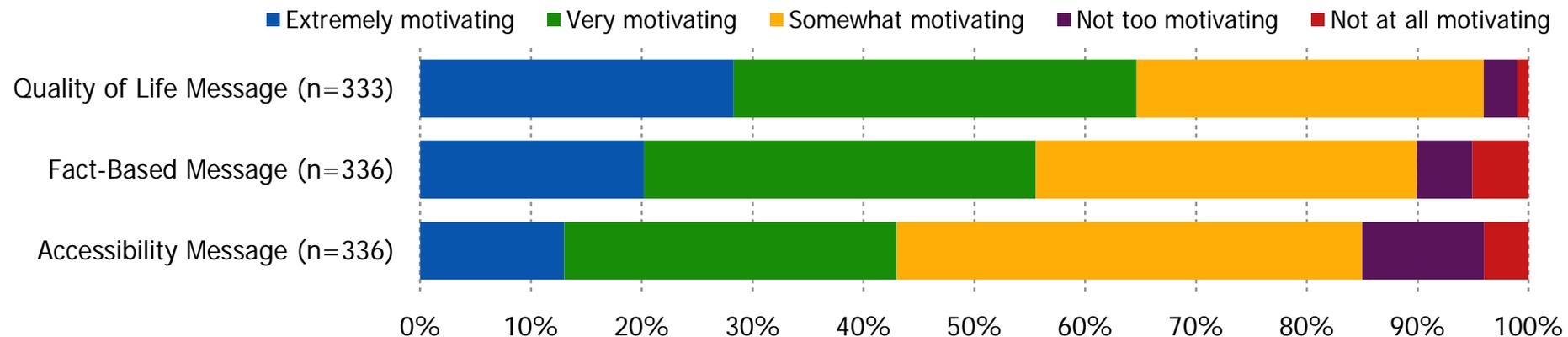
Motivational Messages to Eat Healthier

Fact-Based Message: *Eating a balanced diet* has been shown to reduce your risk of heart disease by nearly one-third.*

Quality of Life Message: *Eating a balanced diet* can not only help you live longer, but it can help you remain independent and active.*

Accessibility Message: *Eating a balanced diet* is not only good for your health, but it is easy to do and affordable.*

** a balanced diet maximizes fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and healthy proteins, and limits things like added sugar, sodium, or saturated fat*



The quality of life message is even more motivating for those age 70+.