

International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation

2010 Food & Health Survey

Consumer Attitudes Toward Food Safety, Nutrition, & Health



INTERNATIONAL
FOOD INFORMATION
COUNCIL FOUNDATION



Executive Summary & Key Trends



The International Food Information Council Foundation's 2010 Food & Health Survey takes an extensive look at what Americans are doing regarding their eating and health habits, and food safety practices.

When it comes to calories consumed versus calories burned, most Americans (58 percent) do not make an effort to balance the two; a large majority of people (77 percent) are not meeting the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Physical Activity Guidelines.

The 2010 *Food & Health Survey: Consumer Attitudes Toward Food Safety, Nutrition & Health*, commissioned by the International Food Information Council Foundation, is the fifth annual national quantitative study designed to gain insights from consumers on important food safety, nutrition, and health-related topics. The research provides the opportunity to gain insight on how consumers view their own diets, their efforts to improve them, how they balance diet and exercise, and their actions when it comes to food safety practices.

There is now more of a need than ever to understand consumers' perceptions of nutrition and food safety issues. The 2010 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* will target, for the first time, an overweight and obese American population and advocate a "total diet" approach. There also are ongoing initiatives to address childhood obesity from the White House to Main Street, including First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move* initiative. Landmark healthcare legislation was signed into law requiring calorie counts at restaurant chains. And, there is pending food safety legislation before the U.S. Congress.

While the *Food and Health Survey* highlights that many different messages about the importance of a healthful lifestyle are being heard, the *Survey* also shows disconnects in consumers' awareness of the relationship between diet, physical activity, and calories. Although weight loss and physical activity are top of mind with Americans, the *Survey* provides valuable insights into consumer beliefs and behaviors with regards to food safety, safe food

handling, and consumer food shopping preferences, among other topics.

This *Survey* offers the important voice and insights of the consumer for the health professionals, government officials, educators, and other interested individuals who seek to improve the lives of Americans.

The following are key findings from 2010 with comparisons to results from the 2006 through the 2009 editions of the *Food & Health Survey*.

Overall Health Status: Americans' perceptions of their health status remains steady from previous years with 38 percent indicating their health is "excellent" or "very good." Although there was no significant change from year to year, Americans' degree of satisfaction with their health status remains relatively high with 57 percent indicating "extremely satisfied" or "somewhat satisfied."

Weight: Americans' concern with their weight status remains unchanged since last year, and continues to be a strong factor influencing the decision to make dietary changes and remain physically active. Most Americans (70 percent) say they are concerned about their weight status, and the vast majority (77 percent) is trying to lose or maintain their weight. When asked what actions they are taking, most Americans say they are changing the *amount* of food they eat (69 percent); changing the *type* of foods they eat (63 percent); and engaging in *physical activity* (60 percent). Further, 65 percent of Americans report weight loss as a top driver for improving the healthfulness of their

Executive Summary & Key Trends

diet; 16 percent report improving their diet to maintain weight. Americans are more singularly focused on making dietary changes for losing weight, rather than a variety of other motivators, as has been true in the past. In addition, losing or maintaining their weight is the top motivator (35 percent) for Americans who are physically active.

Diet and Physical Activity: Two-thirds of Americans (64 percent) report making changes to improve the healthfulness of their diet. The primary driver for making these changes is “to lose weight” (65 percent). Other drivers for making dietary changes have significantly decreased since previous years, including “to improve overall well-being (59 percent vs. 64 percent in 2009) and “to improve physical health” (56 percent vs. 64 percent in 2008). The specific types of dietary changes they most often report are changing the *type* of food they eat (76 percent), changing the *amount* of food they eat (70 percent), and changing *how often* they eat (44 percent).

Americans’ reports of their physical activity levels show that, on average, 63 percent are physically active, and 68 percent of those who are physically active report being “moderately” or “vigorously” active three to five days a week. However, among those who are active, slightly more than half (56 percent) do not include any strength training sessions. Further, a large majority of Americans (77 percent) are not meeting the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ *Physical Activity Guidelines*.

Calorie and Energy Balance: Few Americans (12 percent) can accurately estimate the number of calories they should consume in a day for a person their age, height, weight, and physical activity. Of those who say they are trying to lose or maintain weight, only 19 percent say they are keeping track of calories. Additionally, almost half of Americans do not know how many calories they burn in a day (43 percent) or offer inaccurate estimates (35 percent say 1000 calories or less). When it comes to calories consumed versus calories burned, most Americans (58 percent) do not make an effort to balance the two.

Dietary Fats: Americans are confused about the differences among dietary fats. While Americans who have “heard” of these various types of dietary fats are reducing their

consumption of saturated and *trans* fats (64 percent are trying to consume less *trans* fats and saturated fats), less than half (43 percent) state they consume more Omega-3 fatty acids, and only a quarter (26 percent) state that they are consuming more Omega-6 fatty acids. Americans also seem to be less focused on dietary fat when looking at the Nutrition Facts Panel. When looking at the Nutrition Facts Panel listing of dietary fats, Americans are less frequently focusing on: total fat (62 percent vs. 69 percent in 2009); saturated fat (52 percent vs. 58 percent in 2008); *trans* fat (52 percent vs. 59 percent in 2008); and calories from fat (51 percent vs. 57 percent in 2007).

Carbohydrates and Sugars: Americans who have “heard” of the various types of carbohydrates and sugars are trying to consume more fiber (72 percent) and whole grains (73 percent) in their diets, but remain confused about the benefits of consuming more complex carbohydrates. Americans generally agree with the statement that “moderate amounts of sugar can be part of an overall healthful diet,” however this sentiment declined to 58 percent from 66 percent in 2009.

Protein: New to this year’s *Survey* were questions about protein. Close to half of Americans say they are trying to consume more protein. Moreover, Americans are twice as likely to say protein is found in animal sources (56 percent) vs. plant sources (28 percent). The majority of Americans (68 percent) believe protein helps build muscle.

Sodium: Another new topic to this year’s *Survey* was sodium. More than half of Americans (53 percent) are concerned with the amount of sodium in their diet. Six in ten Americans regularly purchase reduced/lower sodium foods. Among those that do purchase reduced/lower sodium foods, the most cited items include canned soup (58 percent), snacks (48 percent), and canned vegetables (41 percent).

Low-Calorie Sweeteners: Nearly four in ten Americans (38 percent) agree that low-calorie/artificial sweeteners can play a role in weight loss or weight management, and one-third of Americans (34 percent) also agree that low-calorie/artificial sweeteners can reduce the calorie content of foods. Consistent with these data, one-third of Americans (32 percent) say they consume low-calorie/artificial sweeteners to

Executive Summary & Key Trends

help with calorie management.

Caffeine: Nearly three-quarters of Americans (72 percent) report consuming caffeine in moderation this year, significantly more than in 2009 (66 percent). There are also significantly fewer Americans (10 percent vs. 16 percent in 2009) who say they have either eliminated caffeine from their diet or say they consume more than the average person (18 percent in 2010 vs. 22 percent in 2008). Those who say they consume caffeine in moderation are more likely to perceive their health as “very good” or “excellent.”

Food Additives: The majority of Americans (61 percent) agree with at least two out of five statements provided regarding food additive facts or benefits. Those with the highest percent agreement include: “Food additives extend the freshness of food/act as a preservative” (57 percent), “Food additives can add color to food products” (54 percent), and “Food additives can help keep or improve the flavor of food products” (47 percent).

Food Safety: For the past three years, consumer confidence in the safety of the U.S. food supply has remained steady with nearly half of Americans (47 percent) rating themselves as confident in the safety of the U.S. food supply. Those not confident fell significantly (down to 18 percent from 24 percent in 2009) and those who are neither confident nor unconfident increased to 35 percent from 26 percent in 2009.

As in previous years, we see consistency in consumers’ beliefs that food safety is primarily the responsibility of government (74 percent) and industry (70 percent). Overall, approximately one-third of Americans (31 percent) see food safety as a shared responsibility among five or more stakeholder groups including farmers/producers, retailers and themselves.

Safe Food Handling: While still high, there continues to be a decline in basic consumer food safety practices such as washing hands with soap and water (89 percent vs. 92 percent in 2008). These same declines are also relevant in microwave food safety practices, where 69 percent vs. 79 percent in 2008 of Americans

follow all the cooking instructions. Although a significant number of Americans (84 percent) use their microwave to prepare packaged products such as soup, popcorn, and frozen meals where microwave cooking instructions are clearly indicated, an even larger number of Americans (92 percent) cite the main reason for using the microwave is to reheat leftovers, foods, and/or beverages.

Consumer Information Sources and Purchasing Influences: In addition to information gathered on the Nutrition Facts Panel and the food label, consumers were asked about their awareness and use of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s *MyPyramid* food guidance system. While 85 percent of Americans say they are aware of *MyPyramid*, only 29 percent of individuals report having used *MyPyramid* in some way.

Consistent with previous years, taste remains the biggest influence on purchasing decisions (86 percent), followed by price, healthfulness (58 percent) and convenience (56 percent). The importance of price continues to have a large impact on consumers’ food and beverage purchasing decisions (73 percent in 2010 vs. 64 percent in 2006).

Food Labeling: Similar to previous years, Americans say they are actively using the Nutrition Facts Panel (68 percent), the expiration date (66 percent), and, increasingly, the brand name (50 percent vs. 40 percent in 2008) and allergen labeling (11 percent vs. 6 percent in 2008). Among consumers who use the Nutrition Facts Panel, they rank calories as the top piece of information they use (74 percent), followed by sodium content (63 percent vs. 56 percent in 2009). Fewer Americans, however, are looking at total fat content (62 percent vs. 69 percent in 2009) and sugars (62 percent vs. 68 percent in 2008).

Food Purchasing Influences: The vast majority of Americans (88 percent) conduct the bulk of their food shopping at a supermarket/grocery store. Roughly three-quarters of Americans are satisfied with the healthfulness of products offered at their supermarket/grocery store (73 percent) and warehouse membership club (80 percent).

Executive Summary & Key Trends

The full *Survey* findings and Web casts are available on the International Food Information Council Foundation's website: www.foodinsight.org.

About the International Food Information Council Foundation

Our Mission

The International Food Information Council Foundation is dedicated to the mission of effectively communicating science-based information on health, food safety and nutrition for the public good.

Additional information on the Foundation is available on the "About" section of our Web site: www.foodinsight.org.

**Copyright © 2010
International Food Information Council Foundation**

