



The International Food Information Council Foundation's 2013 Food & Health Survey examines Americans' diet, food safety practices and healthy habits.

Americans Experience a "Control Gap" Regarding Their Weight, Diet and Activity Level

But, they recognize room for improvement and opportunities to do better.

The 2013 Food & Health Survey: Consumer Attitudes toward Food Safety, Nutrition & Health, commissioned by the International Food Information Council Foundation, is the eighth annual national quantitative study designed to gain insights from Americans on important food safety, nutrition and health-related topics. The research provides the opportunity to better understand how Americans view their own diets in relation to others, their efforts to improve them, how they balance diet and exercise, their knowledge of food ingredients and components, their beliefs when it comes to food safety, and their behaviors across all of these fronts.

The International Food Information Council Foundation 2013 *Food & Health Survey* was conducted by Mathew Greenwald & Associates of Washington, D.C. This 28 minute, web-based survey was fielded in April 2013. The survey respondents were reflective of the demographics of the U.S. population, and while the sample was very close to the target demographics, the data were weighted to match the demographics of the U.S. population. This year, the weighting adjustments were very minor.

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

The vast majority of Americans believe it's possible to have a great deal of control over their level of physical activity, the healthfulness of their diet and their weight, yet far fewer are actually taking that control. Ninety percent of consumers say it's possible to have "a great deal" or "complete" control over their physical activity, yet only 65 percent are actually trying to take that same amount of control in their own lives—a 25-point "control gap." In terms of the healthfulness of their diet, there is a 20-point gap (88% versus 68%), and regarding their weight, the gap is 16 points (81% versus 65%). This indicates that there are barriers preventing people from taking more control of their physical activity, diet and weight. A lack of willpower (64 percent), the dislike of exercise (60%), the perceived high cost of healthful food (54%), and slow progress (51%) are barriers that prevent Americans from taking greater control over their weight.

On the other hand, when asked about other factors such as their happiness, physical attractiveness, the amount of money they make, and the safety of the foods and beverages they consume, the gap vanishes.

Americans are taking at least as much or more control in these areas of their own lives than they believe is actually possible.

When asked to assign a letter grade on a grade scale form "A" to "F" to their own diet and physical activity, consumers gave themselves an average grade of "C-plus" for their level of physical activity. They grade their personal diets slightly higher with an average grade of "B-minus." While Americans acknowledge that there is room for improvement in their diet, they believe they are doing a full letter grade better than other Americans. They rated the diet of the average American at "C-minus." In order to improve the grade of their own diets, Americans think they should consume a more balanced diet in general, including eating more fruits and vegetables and fewer sweets and snacks.

This year, consumers were asked if they agreed that they would rather lose \$1000 than gain 20 pounds, and slightly more than half of Americans (56%) agreed with the statement either somewhat or strongly. Women were more likely than men, and, predictably, those with higher household incomes were more likely to agree.

The following are other key findings from the 2013 Survey:

Overall Health Status:

Nine out of ten Americans describe their health as good or better, consistent with 2012. The majority (62%) report that their health is either excellent or very good, and only nine percent report that they are in fair or poor health. Despite their belief that they are in good health, many Americans recognize there is room to improve their diet, with only twelve percent giving the healthfulness of their diet a grade of "A" or "A-minus." The average grade that Americans give to their own diet is "B-minus". While they recognize that their diets are not perfect, Americans do tend to believe the healthfulness of their diet is better than that of the "average American." When asked what grade they would provide the healthfulness of the average American's diet, the average grade was "C-minus," a full letter grade lower than their own diets.

Eating a more balanced diet generally—more fruits and vegetables and fewer sweets in particular—is the most common way Americans would improve their diets to earn a better grade. In fact, the majority of Americans (88%) have made efforts to eat more fruits and vegetables. Thirty-three percent have begun the efforts within the past year, and 56 percent have been trying to do it for more than a year. Other efforts Americans are attempting include: cut calories by drinking water, low- and no-calorie beverages (82%), eating more foods with whole grains (78%), cutting back on foods higher in added sugar (75%), consuming smaller portions (73%), cutting back on foods higher in salt (70%), cutting back on foods higher in solid fats (66%), comparing sodium in foods like soup, bread, and frozen meals and choosing the foods with lower numbers (60%), cutting back on full-fat dairy and replace with low- or no-fat alternative (60%), and balancing calories to manage my weight (54%). Women, older Americans and those with a college education are most likely to be performing these actions than their counterparts.

Weight Management:

More than half of Americans (56%) report that they are trying to lose weight. Twenty-seven percent indicate they are trying to maintain their weight, a significant increase from 2012 (22%). These numbers indicate that more Americans are consciously trying to do at least something regarding their weight, with only 15 percent reporting that they are not doing anything regarding their weight, a significant decrease from 2012 (20%).

Calories and Energy Balance:

The majority of Americans think about the number of calories they consume at least sometimes (69%), and twenty percent rarely think about them. Only ten percent report that they never think about the calories they consume. Of the nine out of ten Americans who think about calories at all, most would find it at least somewhat helpful in their efforts to keep track of how many calories they consume if calories were shown on menus, the fronts and backs of packaging and/or listed in recipes. Those who more frequently think about calories are more likely to perceive these tools and methods of presentation as very helpful.

As in previous years, when it comes to calories, only three in ten Americans (30%) correctly believe that all sources of calories play an equal role in weight gain. Twenty-one percent believe calories from sugars are most likely to cause weight gain, and nineteen percent believe that calories from carbohydrates are most likely to cause weight gain—consistent with 2012. Eighteen percent believe it is calories from fats that are most likely to cause weight gain, while only one percent believes that calories from protein are most likely to cause weight gain.

Physical Activity:

The vast majority of Americans (96%) have given at least a little thought to the amount of physical activity they get, with sixty percent reporting that they have given a lot of thought to the issue.

Americans tend to grade their activity level about as highly as their diet. The average grade Americans would give to their physical activity level is "C-plus."

Sustainability:

One in five Americans report that they have given a lot of thought to whether foods and beverages they purchase or consume are produced in a sustainable way, and forty-four percent have given the issue a little thought. When asked what actions they do on a regular basis, about one-third (36%) say they purchase foods and beverages because they are advertised as "natural" on the label. Nearly one-quarter of Americans report buying food and beverages because they are advertised as "organic" on the label (27%). Fewer report regularly buying foods or beverages because they are in recycled and/or recyclable packaging (18%), and buying foods and beverages because they are advertised as "green" or 'eco-friendly" on the label (17%).

Protein:

Nearly six out of ten Americans (57%) are trying to consume packaged foods with protein. The most common reason for eating protein is to have a balanced diet (76%), though many consume protein to maintain energy (62%), to build or maintain muscle strength (56%), and to feel full for longer and delay becoming hungry again (51%).

Fewer than half of Americans indicate that the time of day they get their protein matters to them. In particular, those Americans under the age of 65 and those with college degrees are more likely to say the time of day they consume protein does matter.

Americans believe that higher amounts of protein are especially beneficial for children under twelve (61%) and teens (73%). About half of Americans believe higher amounts of protein are especially beneficial for pregnant women (58%), men aged 20-54 (57%), and women aged 20-54 (53%). Less than half of Americans believe higher amounts of protein are especially beneficial for people aged 55 or older.

Dietary Fats:

Many Americans try to limit the amount of fats they consume. Of those monitoring their fat intake, weight and health considerations, specifically reducing the risk of heart disease, are the main reasons for

monitoring fat content in food and beverage products. However, one in four do try to consume foods or beverages that contain omega-3 fats.

Despite recognizing that not all types of fat have the same impact on health, seven out of ten Americans claim they try to eat as little fat as possible (69%). Many say they are limiting or avoiding several types of fats: *trans* fats (49%), saturated fats (48%), and mono- and poly- unsaturated fats (25%), which are the more healthful fatty acids. Ultimately, no more than half of Americans can identify any given key source of unsaturated fats; moreover, many erroneously think sources of saturated fats have unsaturated fats.

Sodium:

Six out of ten Americans are trying to limit or avoid sodium entirely, most commonly to prevent a future health condition (69%) and to help reduce the risk of heart disease (64%). Sixty percent of Americans consider the sodium content of packaged foods and beverages because sodium plays a role in overall health.

Nearly all Americans (90%) recognize that there are multiple factors that have an impact on reducing blood pressure or keeping it from going higher, including: getting regular physical activity; losing weight; reducing or managing stress; eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat dairy; reducing salt/sodium in the diet; limiting or stopping smoking, and limiting or stopping drinking alcohol.

Fewer Americans recognize the functional role sodium plays in foods and beverages. While three-quarters of consumers know that sodium can act as a preservative in foods and beverages, less than half know that it can offset the bitterness of fruits and vegetables (47%), help prevent harmful bacteria in foods (41%), and improve the texture and firmness of foods (38%).

Carbohydrates & Sugars:

When making packaged food or beverage decisions over the past twelve months, more than half of Americans (58%) say they are trying to limit or avoid sugars. While about half (51%) indicate they are trying to limit or avoid high fructose corn syrup (HFCS), four in ten (40%) say they don't pay attention to HFCS. The majority of Americans also say they don't pay attention to complex (60%) or refined (61%) carbohydrates when making packaged food or beverage decisions. Weight management (70%) and preventing a future health condition (61%) are the most common reasons Americans are considering sugars or carbohydrates when making food purchasing decisions.

Most Americans (84%) believe that moderate amounts of sugars can be part of an overall healthful diet. More than 7 in 10 (71%) believe that people with diabetes can include some foods with sugar as part of their total diet. Additionally, a little more than half of Americans believe that it is not necessary to completely eliminate sugar from their diet in order to lose weight (55%).

Low-Calorie Sweeteners:

More than half of consumers (53%) are considering whether or not the packaged foods or beverages they purchase contain low-calorie sweeteners. For those Americans who consume low-calorie sweeteners (n=243), reducing total calories is the most common reason (68%), followed by preventing a future health condition (30%), and for a preference in taste (30%).

Increasing proportions of Americans recognize the benefits of low-calorie sweeteners and believe that they serve a variety of function. Nearly half of Americans agree that low-calorie sweeteners are an option for people with diabetes (49%), that they can reduce the calorie content of foods (47%), and that they can play

a role in weight loss or weight management (45%). Older Americans (generally those age 50 or older), men, and those with a college degree are more likely to feel positive about low-calorie sweeteners.

Food Additives and Colors:

Only one in ten Americans believe that many man-made food additives have the same properties as their "natural" counterparts. Further, consumers are much more likely to believe the government regulates man-made food additives more than naturally occurring ones. Nearly half of Americans (45%) believe the government regulates man-made food additives a fair amount or a lot, while less than one-third (30%) believe naturally occurring food additives are regulated by the government at the same level.

Functional Foods:

Americans are aware of a number of health relationships associated with a variety of vitamins and nutrients, and other healthful components; however, there are some relationships that are more familiar than others. Americans are most familiar with the health benefits associated with fiber, whole grains, omega-3 fatty acids and probiotics. The majority of Americans is aware of the relationship between fiber and a healthy digestive system (85%) and weight management (72%), but fewer are aware of fiber's associations with heart health and healthy blood sugar (52% and 43% respectively). Seven out of ten Americans are aware that omega-3s can promote heart health, but far fewer know that they can also promote cognition, immune health and eye health. Eight out of ten Americans associate whole grains with heart health, weight management and digestive system health, while six in ten connect whole grains to healthy blood sugar. Two-thirds of Americans draw a link between probiotics and a healthy digestive system. Few think they contribute to immune health.

Lesser understood nutrients include soy, prebiotics, lutein and flavonoids. One-third of Americans know that soy can promote heart health, though just as many incorrectly believe that it is associated with weight management or digestive system-health. Similarly, one-third associate prebiotics with maintaining a healthy digestive system, but one-fourth think they help with immune health—perhaps confusing them with probiotics. One out of four Americans associate lutein with eye health, and only a very small segment of Americans appear to know the benefits of flavonoids (promotion of heart health, 10%; support of blood flow, 7%).

Food Safety:

Although a large majority of Americans remain confident in the safety of the U.S. food supply, there was a significant drop in confidence from 2012 (78%) to 2013 (70%). Unsurprising, there was an increase in Americans who are "not too" or" not at all" confident. Americans are giving at least a little thought to the various elements of food safety: chemicals in food (84%), foodborne illnesses from bacteria (79%), the safety of imported foods (75%), and pesticides (75%). Fewer Americans are giving thought to animal antibiotics (56%) and undeclared allergens (43%).

More than half of Americans believe that imported foods are less safe than foods produced or grown in the USA, a significant increase from 2012 (53% in 2013 vs. 48% in 2012), while 25 percent of Americans believe imported foods are as safe, and only two percent believe they are more safe.

Health professionals (doctor, nurse, dietitian) are among the most trusted sources of food safety information, with 93 percent of Americans finding them at least somewhat trustworthy. Nearly three-quarters of Americans trust friends or family members, and about two-thirds trust the government (FDA, USDA). Less than half of Americans trust food manufacturers to deliver accurate food safety information.

Almost all Americans have heard of Salmonella on food (97%), but nearly half believe that food containing Salmonella bacteria cannot be made safe to eat (45%). Four in ten believe that cooking a food can make it safe to eat if it had Salmonella bacteria on it.

Americans are commonly taking a variety of actions to achieve food safety—especially washing their hands and cutting boards (97% and 89% respectively). The majority are also regularly storing leftovers properly within two hours of serving the food (81%), separating raw meat, poultry and seafood from ready-to-eat or raw foods (77%), and cooking foods to the required temperature (77%). Fewer Americans are using a food thermometer to check the doneness of meat and poultry items. When it comes to encouraging food thermometer use, many Americans report that being given a free thermometer would prompt them to increase their use of a food thermometer. About half report they would be encouraged to use a food thermometer if recipes in cookbooks and on websites listed temperatures in their direction.

Information Sources and Influences:

When asked what impact various factors have on an individual's willingness to believe new information about food and health, the vast majority of Americans (91%) indicate that doing their own research has the most impact: 59 percent say it has a major impact, and 32 percent say it has a minor impact. Other factors include: hearing the information from a trusted friend or family member (87%), hearing the same information from multiple sources (86%), hearing the information from someone who has an advanced degree in health or nutrition (84%), hearing the information in the news (70%), having it just seem true (64%), hearing the same information multiple times from the same source (61%), and hearing or seeing the information on social media (29%).



Most Americans (61%) have seen the *MyPlate* graphic, and forty percent feel they know at least a fair amount about it. About one-third of Americans report having never seen the *MyPlate* graphic.

Food Labeling:

The packaging information most commonly used by American consumers is the expiration date (82%), with significantly more Americans looking at it than in past years (76% in 2012; 63% in 2011). The Nutrition Facts panel is the second most commonly used source of packaging information (67%). These two pieces of information have consistently been at the top of the information consumers seek from the food package. Roughly half of consumers report that they look at the serving size and amount per container (55%), brand name (53%), ingredients list (52%), and cooking instructions/preparation time (45%). Few Americans feel any additional information is needed on food packages.

Of those Americans who use the Nutrition Facts panel, nearly all of them find it helpful for the Nutrition Facts panel to show information on sugars (97%), calories (96%), total fat (95%), fiber (94%), sodium (93%), total carbohydrates (93%), protein (93%), saturated fat (91%), *trans* fat (91%), and unsaturated fat (87%).

Consumers overwhelmingly prefer to see the common names of ingredients on the food package, as opposed to the scientific name (e.g., salt instead of sodium chloride). Ninety-three percent strongly or somewhat agree that they would prefer ingredient lists to use the common name for ingredients.

Americans increasingly believe processed foods can provide various benefits. Eight in ten Americans agree that minimally processed foods can be healthful choices (up from 67% in 2012) and that food processing can help foods stay fresh longer (up from 74% in 2012). A majority of Americans also believe that some processed foods can provide affordable, nutritious options (65%) and that food processing can help improve food safety (54%).

Purchasing Influences:

Similar to past years, taste continues to drive food and beverage choices (89%), followed by price (71%), healthfulness (64%), convenience (56%) and sustainability (36%). Healthfulness and convenience, while consistent with recent years, have steadily increased since the question was first asked in 2006 (healthfulness, 58%; convenience, 48%). Older consumers are more likely to be influenced by healthfulness and sustainability and less likely to be influenced by price and convenience than are younger consumers. Women are more likely than men to be influenced by price, healthfulness and sustainability.

When making decisions about buying packaged food or beverages, at least six in ten Americans report considering calories (72%), whole grains (69%), sodium/salt (69%), fiber (68%), sugars in general (68%), and/or protein (63%).

Family Health:

Six in ten parents feel that their current lifestyle sets a healthful example for their children.

Interestingly, when asked whether they agreed that their generation is the healthiest generation in America, the majority of Americans disagreed either strongly (38%) or somewhat (37%). Only 17 percent of Americans agree that their generation is the healthiest. However, the older Americans get, the more likely they are to agree that their generation is the healthiest.

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

The findings from the first five years of the IFIC Foundation *Food & Health Survey* have been analyzed and published in peer-review journals:

 Is it Time to Rethink Nutrition Communications? A Five-Year Retrospective of Americans' Attitudes Toward Food, Nutrition, and Health

Hornick BA, Childs NM, Smith Edge M, Reinhardt Kapsak W, Dooher C, White C. Is it Time to Rethink Nutrition Communications? A Five-Year Retrospective of Americans' Attitudes Toward Food, Nutrition, and Health. JAND, August 2012.

International Food Information Council Foundation Food & Health Survey, 2006–2010, Food Safety: A Web-enabled Survey

Cody MM, Gravani R, Smith Edge M, Dooher C, White C. International Food Information Council Foundation Food and Health Survey, 2006–2010, Food Safety: A Web-enabled Survey. Food Protection Trends. 2012; 6 (32):309-326.

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 website: www.foodinsight.org.

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