



American Consumer Perceptions of Snacking

August 2024



METHODOLOGY



The International Food Information Council (IFIC) commissioned an online survey among U.S. consumers to measure knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about snacking. One thousand adults ages 18 years and older completed the online survey from May 9-13, 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 Snacking. August 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than half of Americans (56%) replace traditional meals with snacking or by eating smaller meals, according to the [2024 IFIC Food & Health Survey](#). Emerging as its own eating pattern, snacking has become increasingly popular among consumers, especially Gen Z, Millennials, women, and those whose relationship status is single.

While [nutrition scholars](#) have struggled to formally define the word *snack*, nearly all Americans tell us that when they eat or drink something between meals, to them, it is a snack. A rarity that widespread agreement emerges around food and nutrition, this noteworthy finding is one of many eye-opening takeaways from the *IFIC Spotlight Survey* on snacking.

As consumers make food decisions, [nothing outcompetes taste and price](#): they want to enjoy the food they eat, and they require affordability—the foundational elements consumers need before considering healthfulness. To the matter of taste, most consumers favor sweet and salty flavors in their snacks, followed by the sensation of crunchy, and the inclusion of beverages.

Likewise, consumers tend to snack spontaneously, and very few emphasize nutrition. Half (51%) say they have calorie goals for their snacks, and only one in ten consumers confirm they leverage their typical snacks as a moment to add nutrition.

Whether a result of busy schedules or on-the-go lifestyles, data from this *IFIC Spotlight Survey* show that opportunities exist to help consumers get more from their snacks—more nutrition without sacrificing taste. Snacking is poised to be one eating occasion to meet multiple goals, and understanding the heterogeneity of consumer desires and their associated snacking [profiles](#) is an important element to meet the challenges associated with snacking and to fully realize the health and nutrition opportunities.

IFIC commissioned this *IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Consumer Perceptions of Snacking* to study U.S. consumer mindset related to snacking.



KEY FINDINGS

Almost 9 out of 10 Americans call what they eat or drink between meals a “snack.”

To gain alignment on terminology, when asked if they eat or drink something between meals, and what do they call it, 89% of Americans call it a snack. Less than one-in-ten call it "grazing," "a mini meal," "a treat," and "picking."

More than 4 in 10 Americans say they feel content and/or happy when snacking.

Americans feel a range of emotions when snacking, but the most common is content (42%) followed closely by happy (41%). Only 21% of Americans say that they feel bored when snacking while 17% express feeling energetic. Fewer still, 10%, say that they experience a sense of guilt.

Americans typically snack on sweet, salty, and crunchy foods, and nearly half include a beverage.

Most Americans favor sweet as well as salty for at least one part of their snacks: 59% say sweet and salty is a close second at 58%. Crunchy is not far behind (48%), tied with choosing a beverage (48%). Fresh and packaged foods vie for the fourth spot at 36% and 34%, respectively. While spicy is only preferred by 24% of Americans, being under the age of 45 years makes a consumer more likely to prefer spicy snacks as compared to those 45-64 years and the 65+ years.

Half of Americans do not set calories goals when snacking.

Half of Americans say they do not have calorie goals when snacking: 49% of Americans do not have such a goal whereas 51% do. Among those who say they have a target, 17% of consumers favor 200 calories per snack while only 10% aim for 100 calories. People earning less than \$40,000 annually are less likely to have calorie goals for their snacks as compared to other income brackets (i.e., \$40,000 - \$79,000 and \$80,000+).

KEY FINDINGS

2 in 3 Americans say their snacks are more likely to be spontaneous than planned.

Most snackers report that they consume spontaneous snacks. While two-thirds (66%) are enjoying unplanned snacking, only 11% of Americans have a planned snack. One in five Americans say they have a fairly equal mix of both planned and spontaneous snacks.

Among the five food groups, most American snackers seek fruit in their snacks followed equally by protein and/or grains.

When we asked consumers what they seek in their typical snack, most Americans seek fruit (58%) whereas only one-third say vegetables. Protein as well as grains contend for the second-most preferred component of a typical snack (43% each). Twenty-one percent of Americans say they do not seek to include any of the provided options (i.e., fruit, protein, grain, dairy, vegetables, specific nutrients) in their snacks. Most Americans tend to lean toward eating based on specific foods (preferences) instead of prioritizing nutrients as only 18% say they seek specific vitamins, minerals, or other nutrients.

More than 4 in 10 Americans say their typical snack satisfies their hunger between meals and is an extra treat.

As consumers compare their typical snacks with their typical meals, 45% say their typical snack satisfies their hunger to keep them going between meals, and 41% say their typical snack provides an extra treat or indulgence. Around one in ten say their typical snack contains similar foods as their typical meals, but in smaller portions (14%); and 11% report that their typical snack contains similar foods in similar portions as their typical meal. Ten percent of Americans use their typical snack to add nutrition that their typical meal falls short on.

Americans choose their typical snack to satisfy hunger, a specific taste, and/or desire for convenience.

Consumers choose snacks primarily to satisfy their hunger (56%) followed by the need to meet a specific taste (45%), convenience (35%), and to feel more energetic (23%). Only 15% choose a snack because it is healthy.

KEY FINDINGS

More Americans say they snack in the afternoon and evening, but morning snacks get highest net healthy rating.

When asked to consider their typical snacks throughout the day, consumers say their morning snack is the most healthy, and their late-night snack is their least healthy. Net healthy ratings decline over the day: morning +34%; afternoon +27%; evening +17%; and late-night +1%. Consumers who are 65+ years are more likely to avoid late-night snacking as compared to other age brackets, under 45 years and 45-64 years.

Among those who rate at least one of their typical snacks less than healthy, nearly 4 in 10 say healthy, portable snack ideas would help them improve the healthfulness of their snacks.

A subset of consumers who describe their snacks as either very unhealthy, somewhat unhealthy, or neither unhealthy nor healthy, provided feedback regarding what would help them improve the healthfulness of their snacks. Nearly forty percent of Americans say they would like ideas for healthy, portable snacks (38%). Still, one-third are not interested in improving the healthfulness of their snacks. One-quarter would like help with planning and advance preparation while the same amount would like information on what constitutes a healthy snack.



IMPLICATIONS

Americans' diet quality rating, as measured by the [Healthy Eating Index](#), is 58 out of 100. Often described as a failing score, health professionals and nutrition scientists agree that improving diet quality is a priority to advance health and well-being of Americans. Specifically, resources like the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) provide advice on "what to eat and drink to meet nutrient needs, promote health, and help prevent chronic disease."

The emergence of snacking as its own dietary pattern may surprise some. Still, the opportunity exists to rebalance the composition of snacks as a vehicle for enhancing overall health. In this survey, Americans report that they want support to improve the healthfulness of their snacks, including ideas for healthy, portable snacks; tips for planning and preparing snacks in advance; more information about what a healthy snack includes; and reminders or prompts to choose healthier snacks. Consumers' interest and enthusiasm for dietary modification is an invitation to which all food and nutrition communicators should apply some concentration.

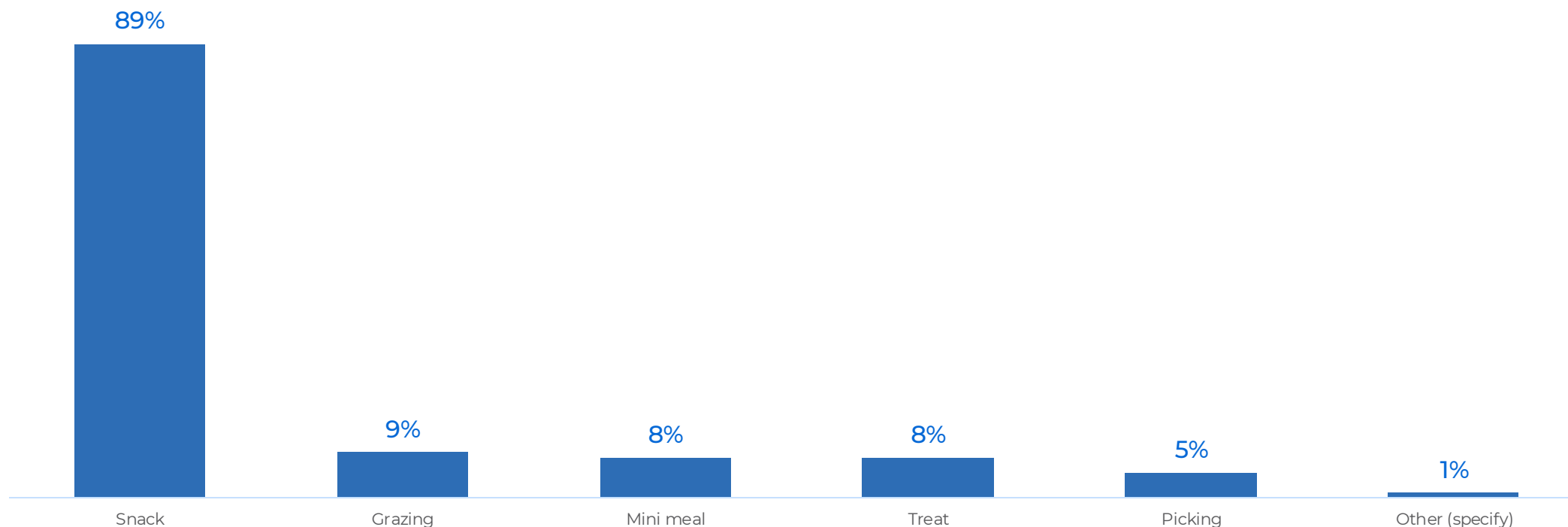
Incorporating foods and beverages from under-consumed food groups, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and dairy, into snacks would boost American diet quality. While most people do not adhere to the *Dietary Guidelines*, and profound, drastic changes to diet are rarely permanent, nearly everybody snacks, which presents a prime opportunity to reframe snacking connotations.

In other words, it will take more work—all of us in this together—to meet the needs of consumers and help them find ways to level up their diets, including their snacks, while still enjoying and affording their favorite foods and beverages.

Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Consumer Perceptions of Snacking

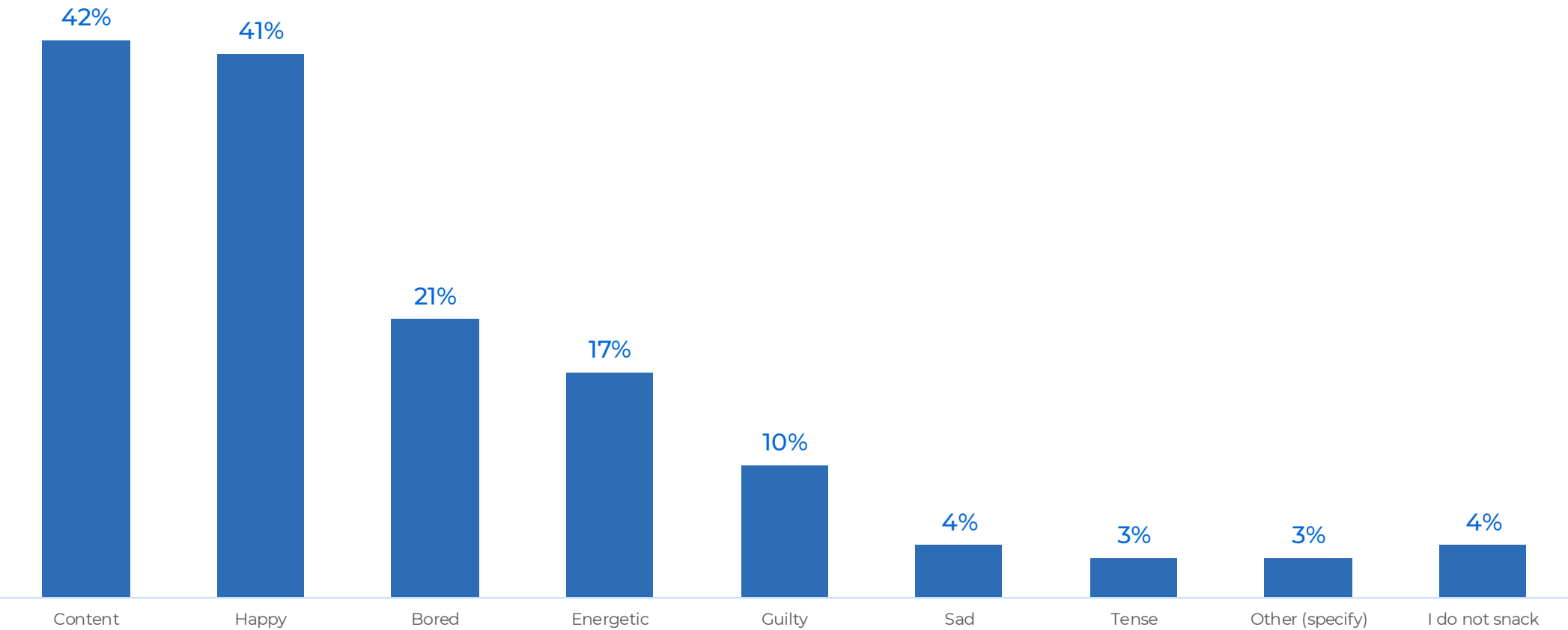


Almost 9 out of 10 Americans call what they eat or drink between meals a “snack.”



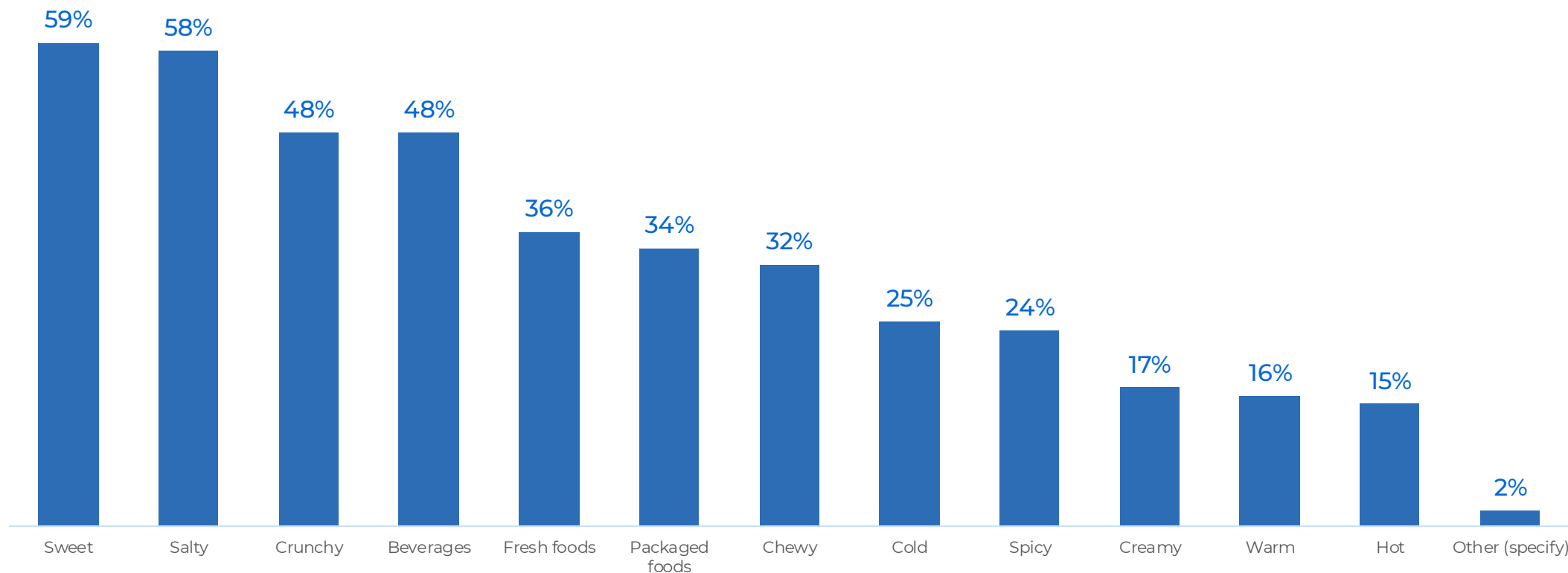
More than 4 in 10 Americans say they feel content and/or happy when snacking.

One in 10 feel guilty when they snack.



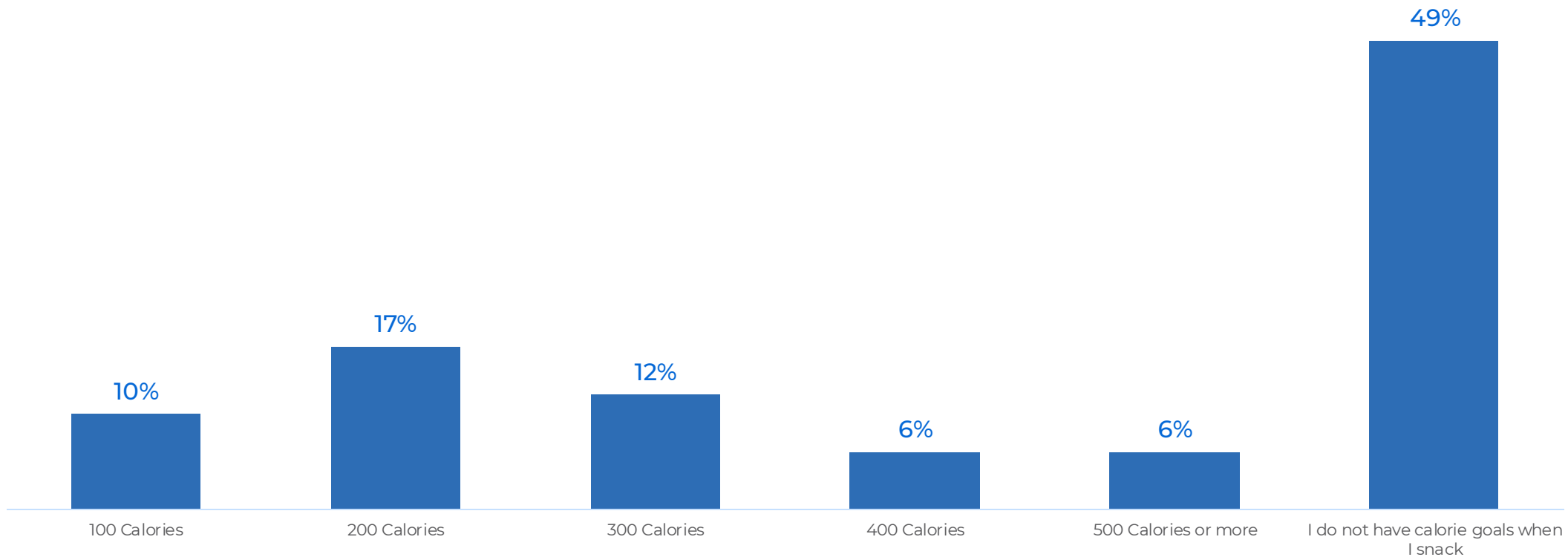
Americans typically snack on sweet, salty, and crunchy foods, and nearly half include a beverage.

Nearly one-quarter of Americans usually have spicy foods as part of their snack.



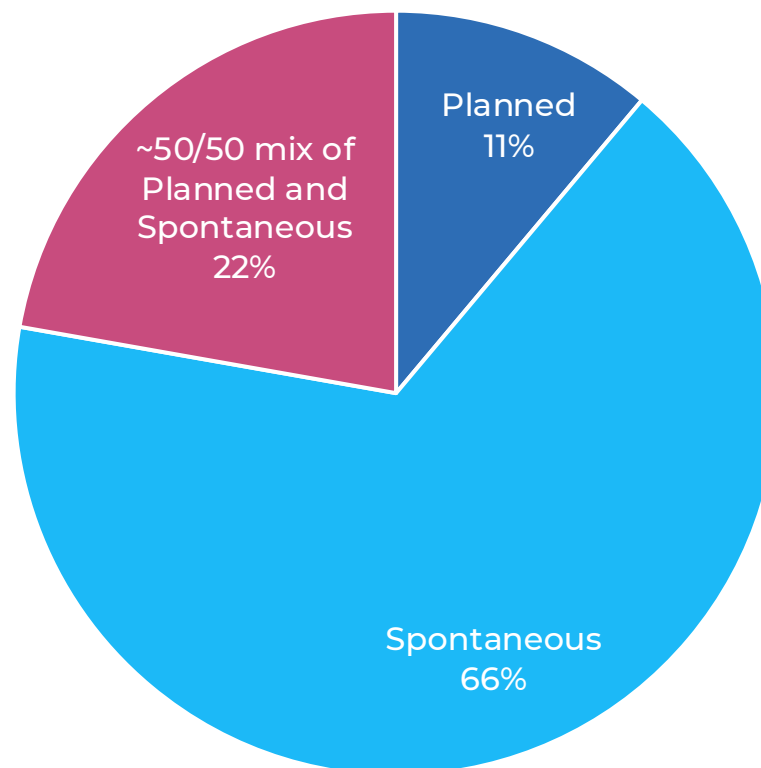
Half of Americans do not set calorie goals when snacking.

Among those who report having a typical snacking calorie goal, 200 calories is the most reported target.



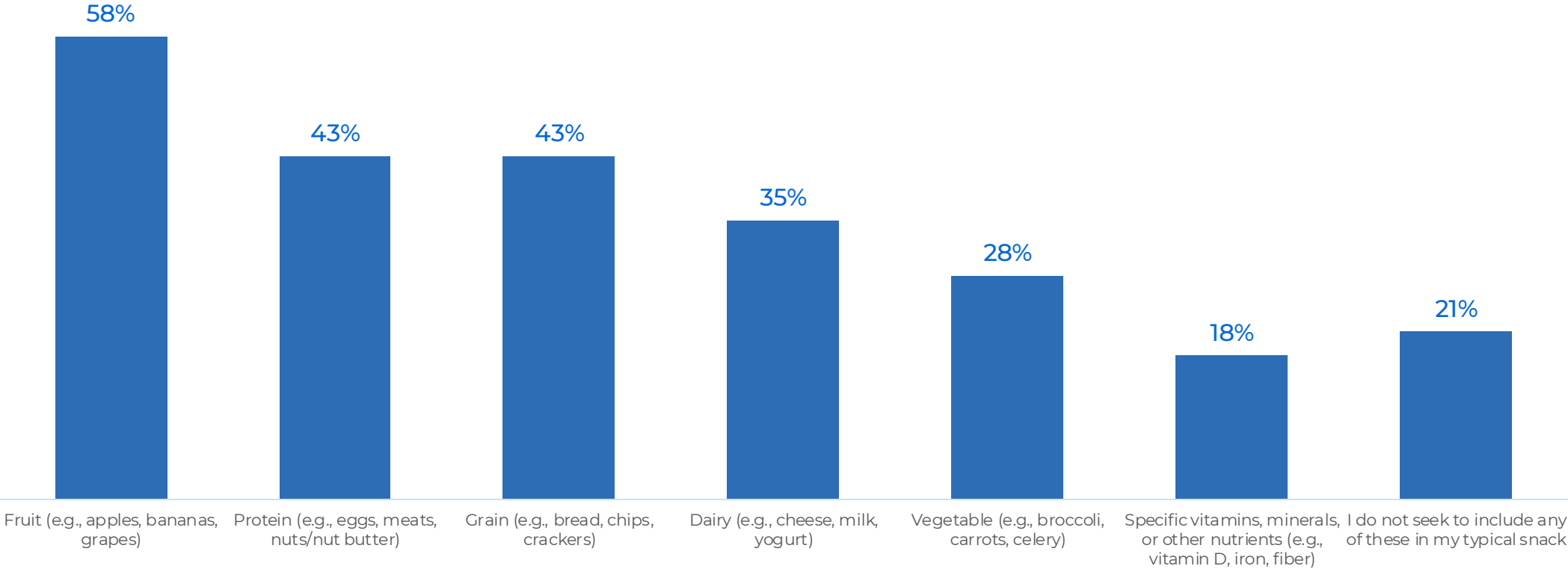
2 in 3 Americans say their snacks are more likely to be spontaneous than planned.

About one in 10 Americans say their snacks are more likely to be planned.



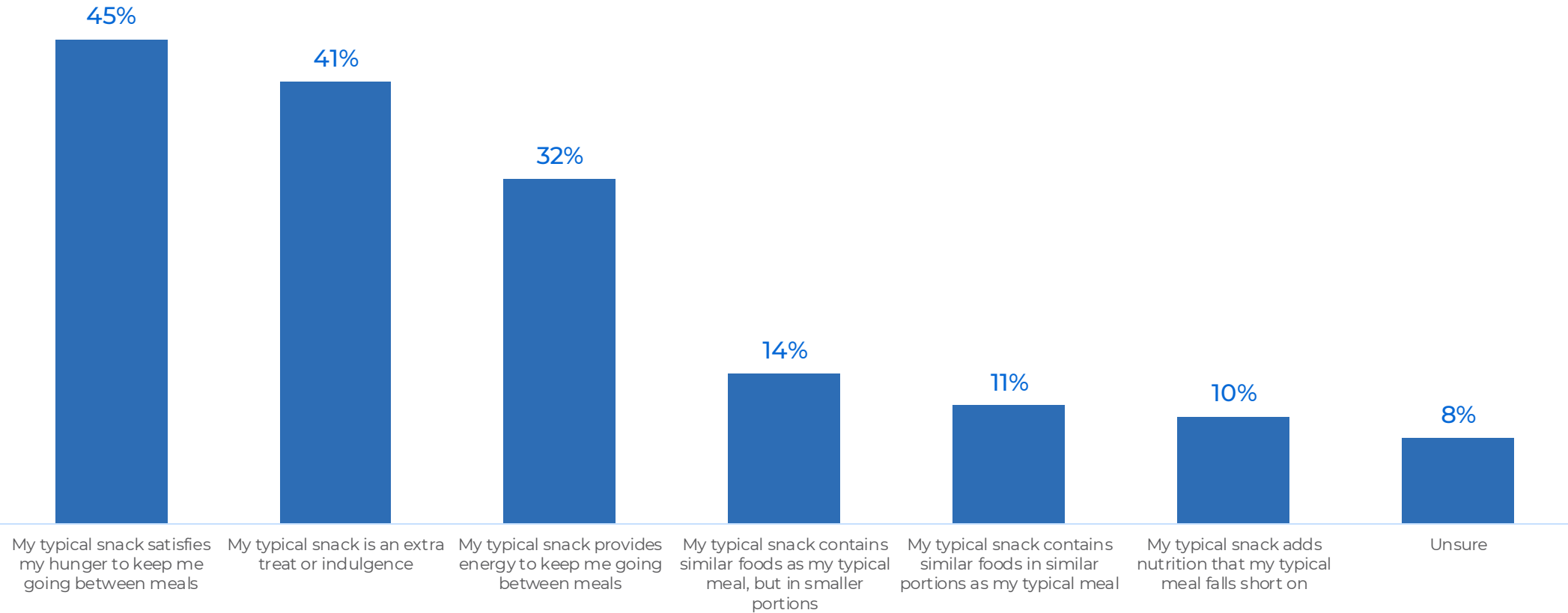
Among the five food groups, most American snackers seek fruit in their snacks followed equally by protein and grains.

More people seek foods/food groups than specific nutrients in their typical snacks. 1 in 5 do not seek any specific food group or nutrient when snacking.



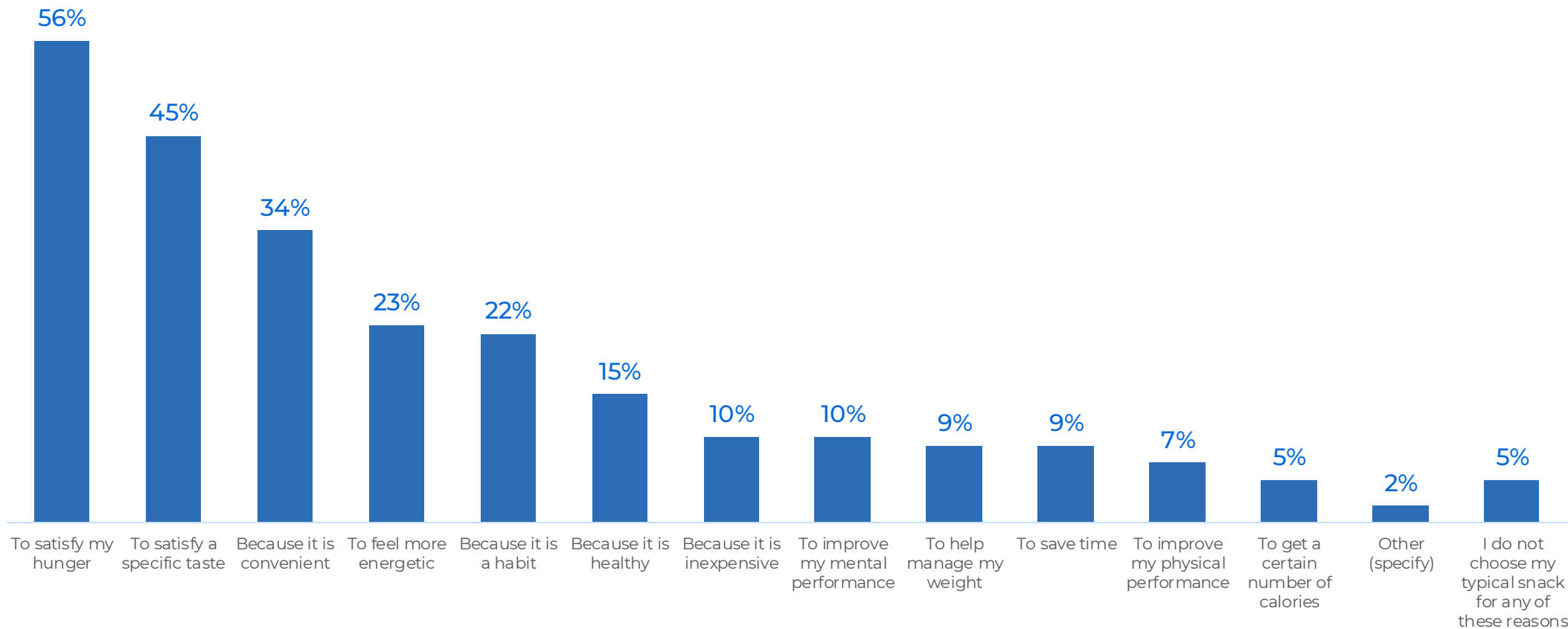
More than 4 in 10 Americans say their typical snack satisfies their hunger between meals and/or is an extra treat.

Only 1 in 10 say their typical snack adds nutrition that their meals lack.



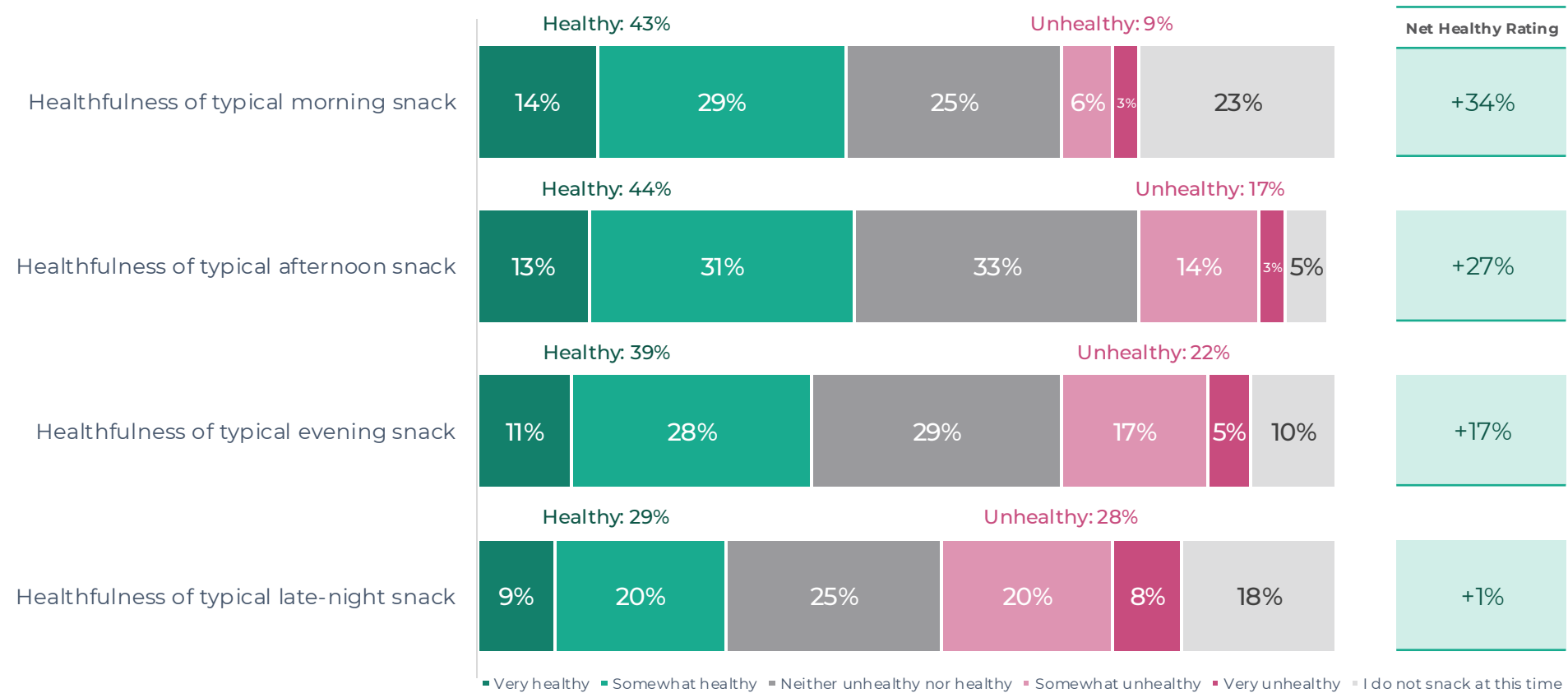
Americans choose their typical snack to satisfy hunger, a specific taste, and desire for convenience.

Only 15 percent choose a snack because it is healthy.



More Americans say they snack in the afternoon and evening, but morning snacks get highest net healthy rating.

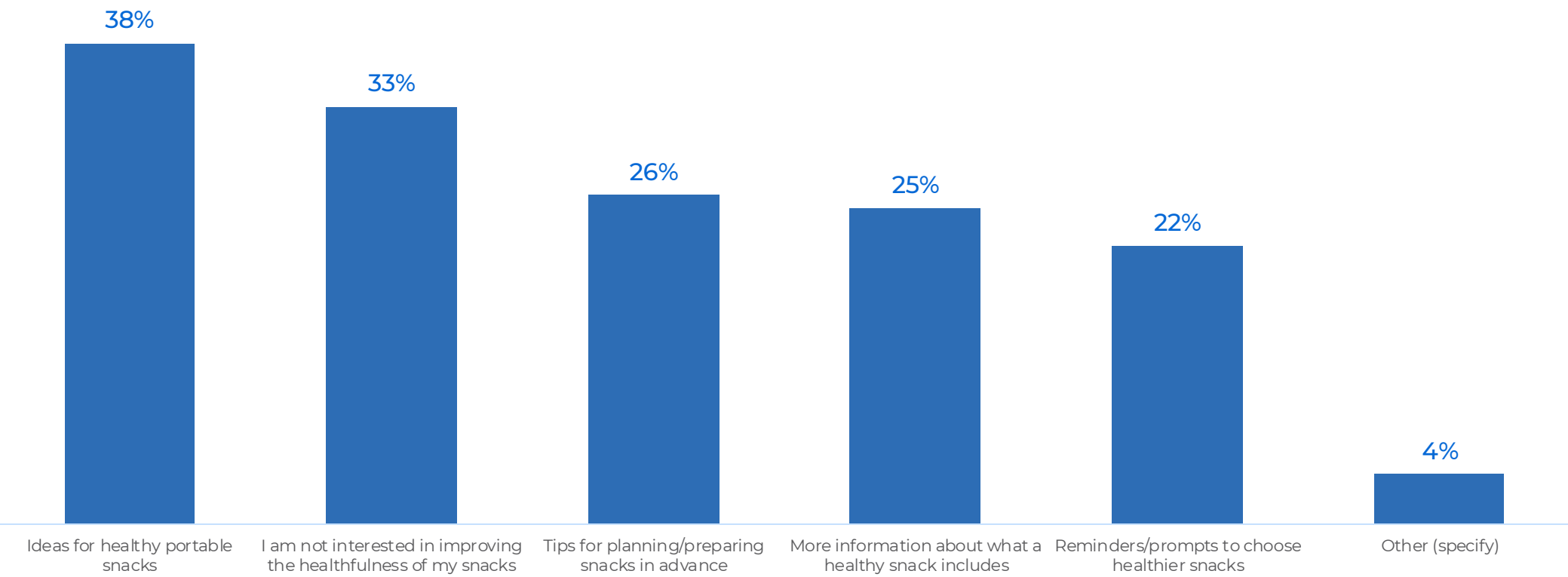
Net healthy rating of snacks steadily declines throughout the day from Morning (+34%) to Late-Night (+1%).



Q9. Consider your typical snack during the morning, afternoon, evening, and late-night hours. On a scale of 1-5, please rate the healthfulness of your typical snack during these times. (n=961; FILTER: those who snack) *No hourly parameters were provided for each time of day

Among those who rated at least one of their typical snacks less than healthy, nearly 4 in 10 say healthy, portable snack ideas would help them improve the healthfulness of their snacks.

1 in 3 are not interested in improving the healthfulness of their snacks.



Q10. You described some of your typical snacks as less than healthy. What would help you improve the healthfulness of your snacks? Select all that apply. (n=706; FILTER; those who rated at least one of their typical daily snack(s) as very unhealthy, somewhat unhealthy, or neither unhealthy nor healthy)



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