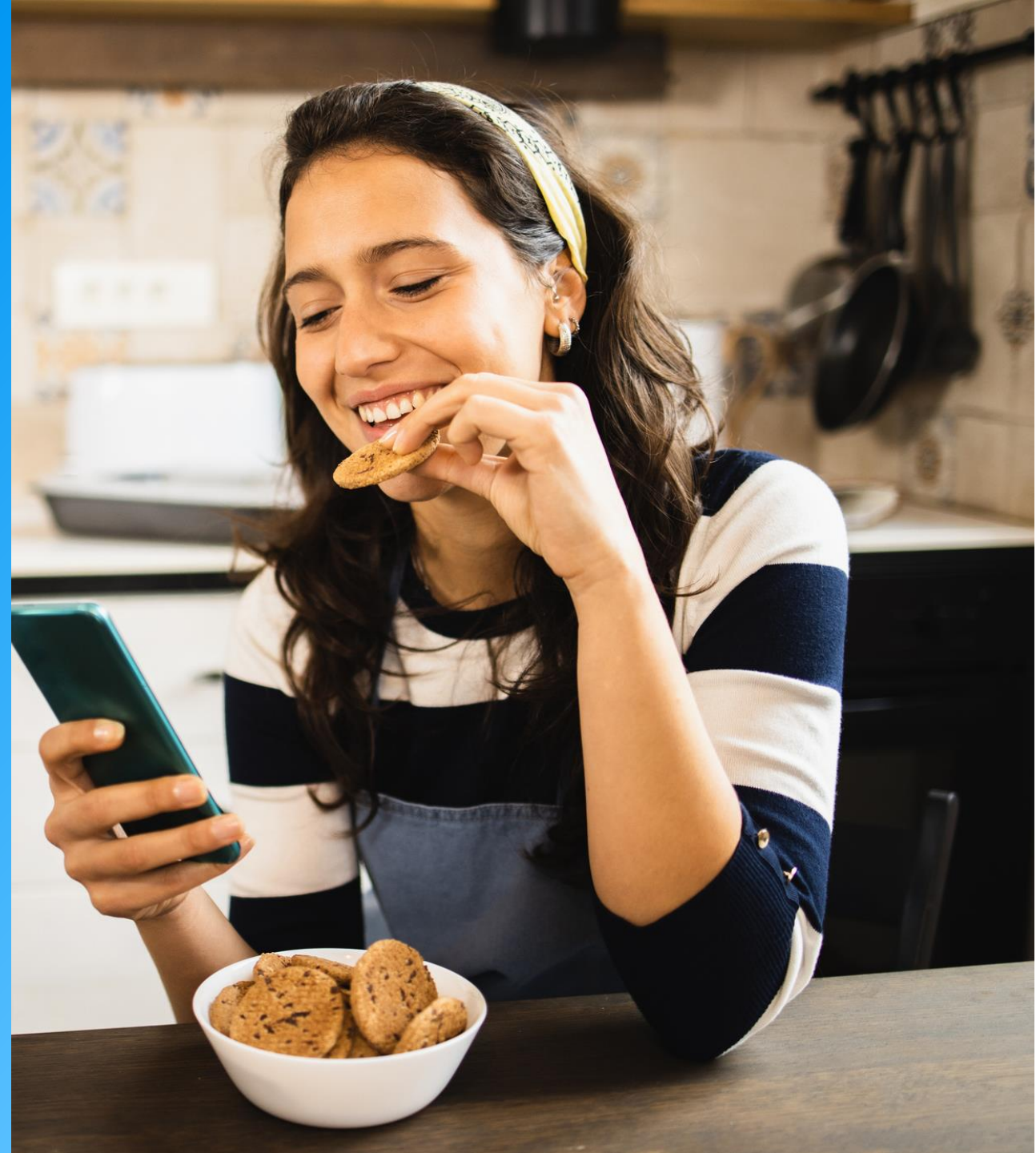




2024 IFIC
SPOTLIGHT
SURVEY

American Perceptions Of Sweeteners In Foods & Beverages

November 2024



METHODOLOGY



The International Food Information Council (IFIC) commissioned an online survey among U.S. consumers to gauge perceptions, preferences, and recent consumption patterns of sweeteners in foods and beverages. One thousand adults ages 18 years and older completed the online survey from April 5-9, 2024, and 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 Perceptions Of Sweeteners In Foods & Beverages. November 2024.

METHODOLOGY



Some questions in this 2024 sweeteners survey were also asked in IFIC’s 2023 sweeteners survey. The following preamble was provided to respondents prior to taking both surveys:

“This survey will ask you about your opinions and actions related to non-sugar sweeteners—both the kind that you can add to foods and beverages from packets, and the kind that are used as an ingredient in packaged foods and beverages. Some of these sweeteners are considered low-calorie (e.g., aspartame) and others are no-calorie (e.g., sucralose and stevia). For these types of sweeteners, this survey uses the term ‘low- and no-calorie sweeteners.’ This survey also includes questions about other types of sweeteners.”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

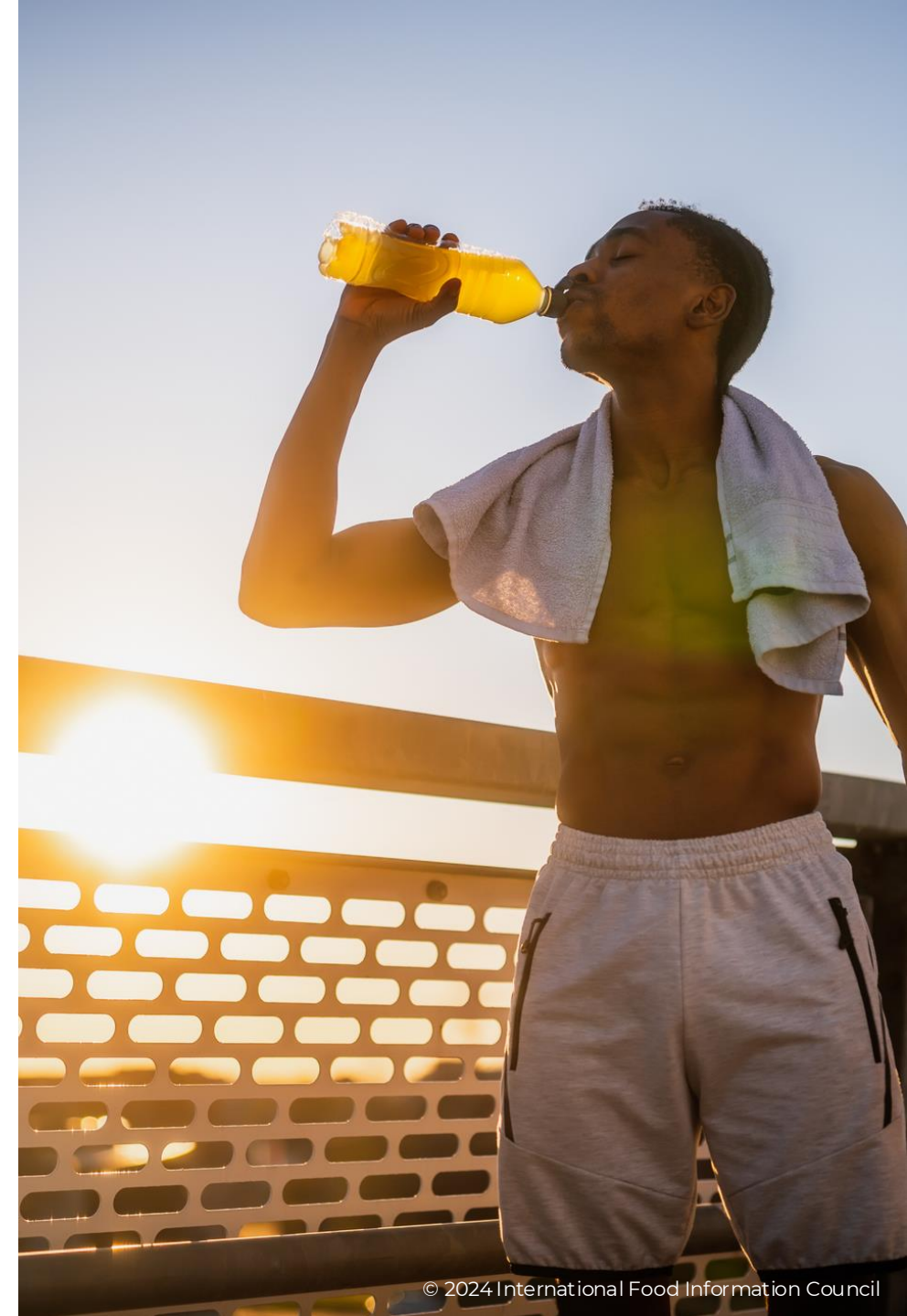
Dietary guidance has long focused on sweeteners. One of the original seven pillars in the 1980 *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGA) encouraged Americans to “avoid too much sugar.” In 2015, for the first time the DGA recommended a specific amount of added sugars in the diet to aim for—less than 10% of total calories. This U.S. guidance still stands today. According to recent *IFIC Food & Health Surveys*, about 3 in 4 Americans say they are trying to limit or avoid sugars in their diet. Yet, most Americans still consume more added sugar than is recommended.

A tool that many rely on to reduce their intake of added sugars is low-calorie sweeteners such as aspartame and no-calorie sweeteners such as stevia and sucralose. Since 2010, the DGA have recommended that consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners (LNCS) can support reducing calorie intake and short-term weight management, while simultaneously asserting that the effectiveness of LNCS as a long-term weight management strategy is unclear. The 2015 DGA confirmed the U.S. FDA’s position that approved LNCS are safe to consume within specified amounts. The 2020 DGA recommended that children younger than two years of age should not consume LNCS to help reduce the development of preferences for overly sweet foods.

More recent guidance on sweeteners has come from outside the U.S. In May and July of 2023, scientific evaluations of LNCS from three bodies within the World Health Organization (WHO) were released by the Nutrition Guidance Expert Advisory Group, the International Agency for Research on Cancer, and the WHO/FAO Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives. These reports received global media attention, partially for their conflicting results.

This IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Perceptions Of Sweeteners In Foods & Beverages was conducted in April of 2024 as a follow up to IFIC’s survey, “[Public Perceptions of Dietary Sweeteners](#)” conducted in April 2023. The 2024 survey examines reported changes among American consumers between April 2023 and April 2024 related to LNCS consumption habits, sweetener preferences, and what information sources people use to inform their opinions about LNCS safety.

Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Perceptions Of Sweeteners In Foods & Beverages



KEY FINDINGS

One in three Americans say they did not change their consumption of low- and no-calorie sweeteners between April 2023 and April 2024.

In the 12 months prior to April 2024, 30% of Americans say they did not consume low- and no-calorie sweeteners (LNCS) from a food, beverage, or tabletop packet. A similar percentage (34%) say their LNCS consumption stayed the same. However, 1 in 3 (33%) reported altering their LNCS consumption in some way, with 6% saying they started consuming LNCS, 6% stopped, 10% increased, and 11% decreased.

Of those who say they decreased or stopped consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners between April 2023 and April 2024, most recall doing so in 2023.

Among the 17% of survey takers who say they decreased or stopped consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners (LNCS) in the 12 months prior to taking this survey in April 2024, half (52%) say they did so 7-12 months before taking this survey, while four in ten (38%) did so less than 6 months before taking this survey. The remaining 10% was not sure when they began to decrease or stop consuming LNCS in the 12 months before taking this survey.

Of those who say they decreased or stopped consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners between April 2023 and April 2024, most did so as a change of habit.

Among the 17% of survey takers who say they decreased or stopped consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners (LNCS) in the 12 months prior to taking this survey in April 2024, one in three (36%) did so because they changed their eating and drinking habits. Three in ten (31%) decreased or stopped consuming LNCS because they heard they were unsafe to consume, while 14% did so because their doctor recommended it, and 7% did so because they stopped trying to lose weight.

Of those who say they increased or started consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners between April 2023 and April 2024, most did so to manage body weight.

Sixteen percent of survey takers say they increased or started consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners (LNCS) in the 12 months prior to taking this survey in April 2024. Of these, three in ten (29%) did so because they started trying to lose or maintain weight and one in four (25%) did so because they changed their eating and drinking habits. One in five (21%) increased or started consuming LNCS because they heard they were safe to consume, and a similar percentage (19%) did so because their doctor recommended it.

KEY FINDINGS

Most Americans have not heard of allulose.

One in eight (13%) survey takers have heard of allulose. In 2021, IFIC consumer research found a similar level of awareness of allulose (15%). [Allulose](#) is a type of rare sugar that occurs naturally in small quantities in plant foods such as brown sugar, maple syrup, wheat, and dried fruits like figs and raisins. Allulose is also commercially produced. Allulose was first permitted for use as a sweetener in foods and beverages by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in 2012.

Americans say they are more likely to consume foods and beverages with sugars than those with low- and no-calorie sweeteners, allulose, or sugar alcohols.

Survey takers were asked on a scale of 1-10 how likely they would be to consume a variety of types of sweeteners—sugars, low- and no-calorie sweeteners (LNCS), sugar alcohols, and allulose. Honey is the most likely to be consumed sweetener, given an average rating of 7.3 out of 10. Honey was followed by brown sugar (6.6), sucrose (6.3), agave syrup (5.1), and high-fructose corn syrup (5.0). Stevia is the most likely to be consumed LNCS, given an average rating of 4.8 out of 10. Stevia was followed by monk fruit (4.3), sucralose (4.0), aspartame (3.9), and saccharin (3.6).

More than half (56%) agree that consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners can benefit the health of some people.

Survey takers were asked if they agreed or disagreed that consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners (LNCS) could benefit the health of some individuals. One in four (25%) strongly agreed, 31% somewhat agreed, and 22% neither agreed nor disagreed. Conversely, 8% somewhat disagreed, 9% strongly disagreed, and 6% were not sure that consuming LNCS could benefit the health of some individuals.

Most Americans say they inform their opinion about the safety of consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners by doing their own research.

Americans look to a variety of sources to inform their food decisions, including decisions they make about the safety of consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners (LNCS). Four in ten (42%) inform their opinion of LNCS safety by doing their own research. Three in ten (31%) inform their opinion by talking to a health professional, while fewer rely on friends/family (19%), news reports and articles (18%), and/or their trust in the U.S. government's approval process (17%).

KEY FINDINGS

Most Americans say they would consult the ingredients list and the Nutrition Facts label to determine if a packaged food or beverage contains low- or no-calorie sweeteners.

To determine the presence of a low- and no-calorie sweetener (LNCS) in a food or beverage, most Americans say they would look to the list of ingredients (49%) and the Nutrition Facts label (42%). Two in ten would look for specific words (20%) or phrases (19%) on the front of food and beverage packaging. Fewer than one in ten (6%) Americans say they do not look closely enough for this type of information on food packaging.

LNCS, sugars, and sugar alcohols are required to be labeled on food packaging in different ways.

- **Sugars**, both Total Sugars and Added Sugars, are required to be displayed in gram amounts per serving on the Nutrition Facts label. Individual types of sugars are also required to appear in the list of ingredients.
- **Sugar alcohols** are not required to be displayed on the Nutrition Facts label unless a product makes a claim on its label about sugar alcohols or sugar content. If such a claim is made, then the number of grams of sugar alcohols in a serving of the product must be displayed on the Nutrition Facts label. If only one type of sugar alcohol such as erythritol is used, some products will call it out by name on the Nutrition Facts label, but that level of detail is not required by the FDA.
- **LNCS** are not required to be displayed on the Nutrition Facts label but are required to appear in the list of ingredients.

Healthcare providers and health-focused websites are the top sources that people would recommend to friends and family to learn more about low- and no-calorie sweeteners.

Survey takers were asked to identify the top three sources of information they would recommend to a friend or family member if they were asked where they could learn more about low- and no-calorie sweeteners (LNCS). The most recommended source would be health care providers (35%), followed by health-focused websites (29%). More than two in ten would include registered dietitians (24%) and/or U.S. government websites (22%) in their recommendations, while fewer would point their friends and family to clinical studies in scientific journals (15%), news reports and articles (10%), or social media influencers/bloggers (5%).

Nearly one in five (18%) survey takers did not identify any of 12 information sources provided. Specifically, 6% say they would not recommend any of the sources provided and 12% say they do not know which source(s) they would recommend.

IMPLICATIONS

Sugar reduction remains a top public health priority, as most Americans consume more added sugar than is recommended, primarily in the form of sugar-sweetened beverages. Many strategies have been recommended to reduce added sugar consumption, the first and foremost being to drink more plain water. Other recommendations encourage people to more frequently select beverages such as unsweetened coffee and tea, and low- and no-calorie sweetened beverages.

A conundrum in sugar reduction efforts is that IFIC consumer research, including this Spotlight Survey, has repeatedly revealed that Americans prefer caloric sweeteners more than low- and no-calorie sweeteners (LNCS). However, this Spotlight Survey also found that most Americans agree that some people can benefit from consuming LNCS.

Sweetener communication does not have to be an either/or proposition. Effective communication about food and beverage choices should align with established scientific evidence such as those found in the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Recent findings from IFIC's October [Spotlight Survey: Americans' Trust in Food & Nutrition Science](#) illuminate an alarming public perception—8 in 10 Americans believe that recommendations about what to eat and drink are always changing. This belief is in direct contrast to advice on topics like added sugar that has remained consistent for four-plus decades to avoid too much, limit it, or moderate it. This discrepancy between public perception and reality highlights the importance of unified, consistent, evidence-based messaging.

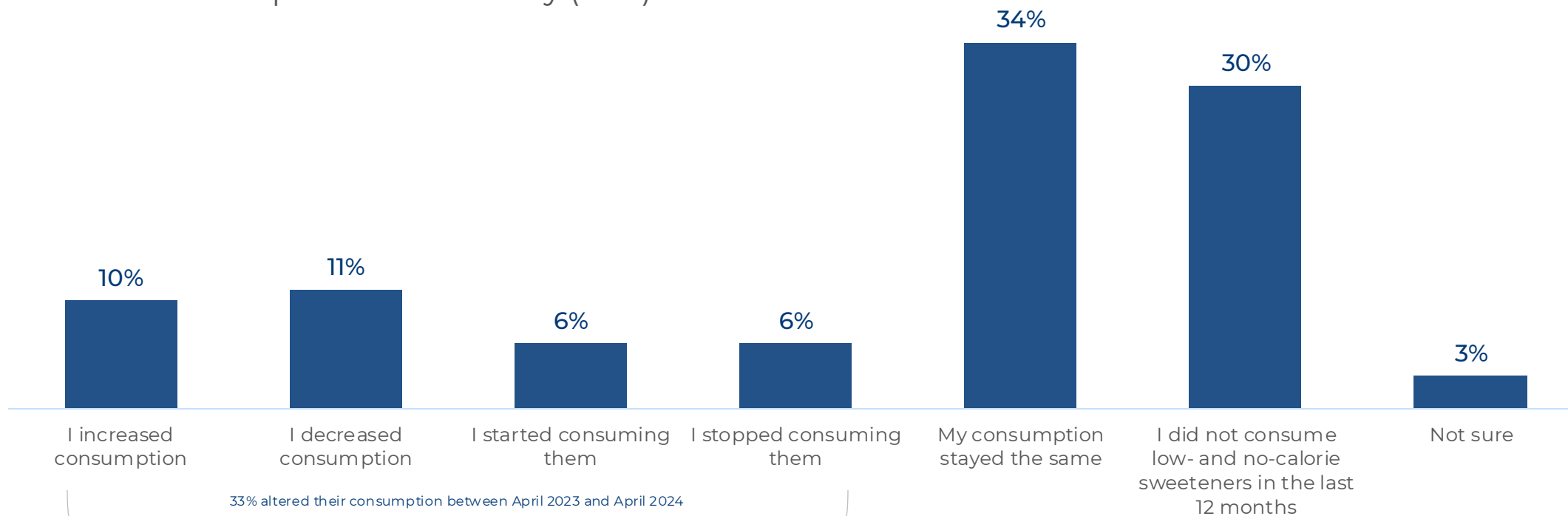
We live in an overstimulated information environment and deciphering fact from fiction can be frustrating. Therefore, it is not surprising that LNCS sentiments are low given that 42% of Americans say their opinions about LNCS safety are informed by doing their own research. Still, the role of health professionals should not be overlooked, as 31% of Americans also rely on talking to them to inform their opinion of LNCS safety. Therefore, it is critical that healthcare providers view themselves as science communicators, hone their science communication skills, and refer their patients to credible sources when topics fall outside their scope of expertise.

Source: 2024 IFIC Spotlight Survey: American Perceptions Of Sweeteners In Foods & Beverages

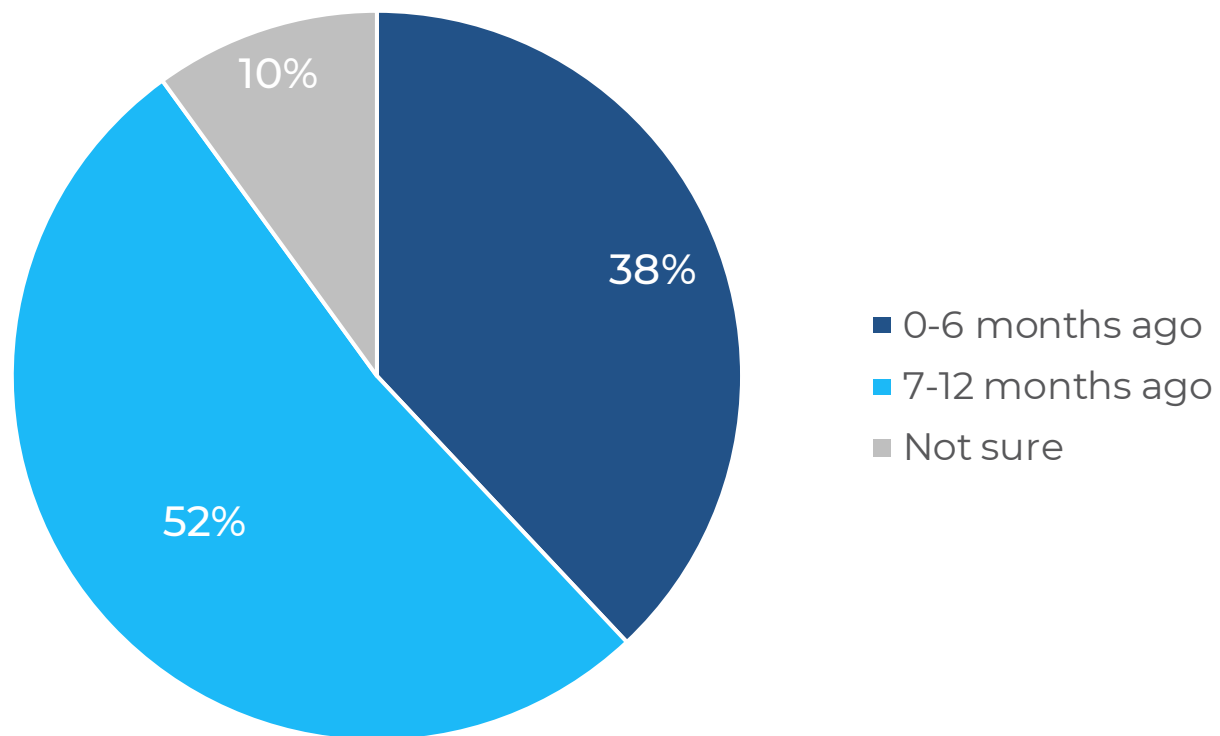


One in three Americans say they did not change their consumption of low- and no-calorie sweeteners between April 2023 and April 2024.

While three in ten (30%) say they did not consume low- and no-calorie sweeteners during this time, one-third altered their consumption in some way (33%).

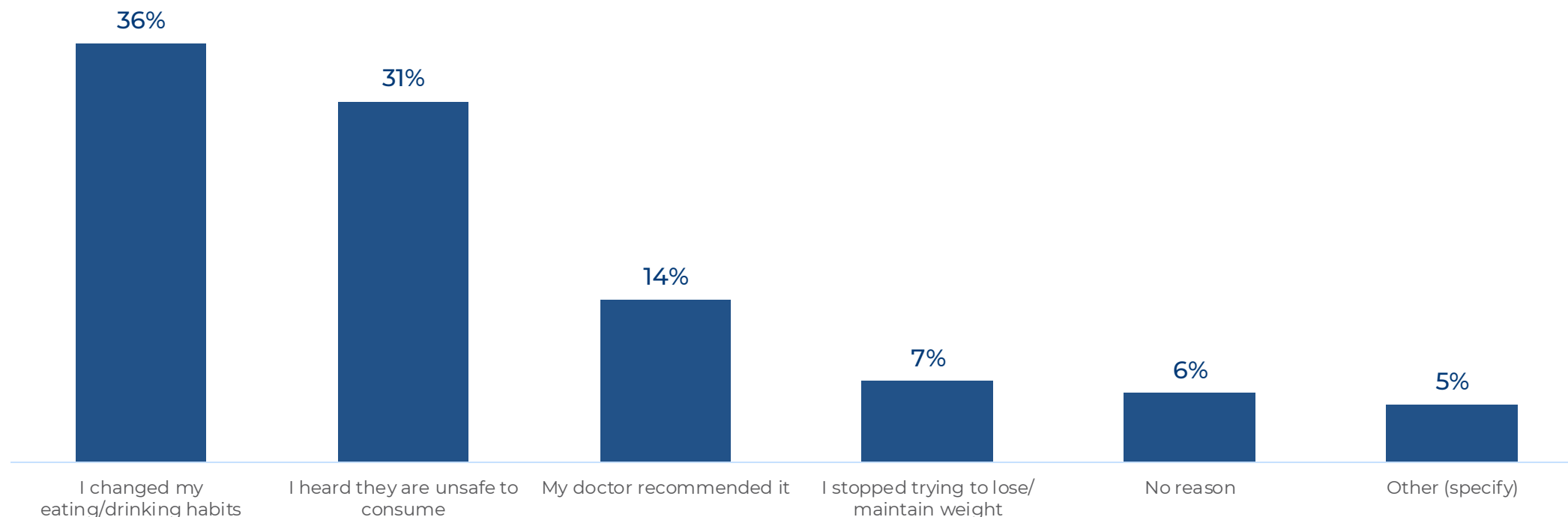


Of those who say they decreased or stopped consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners between April 2023 and April 2024, most recall doing so in 2023.



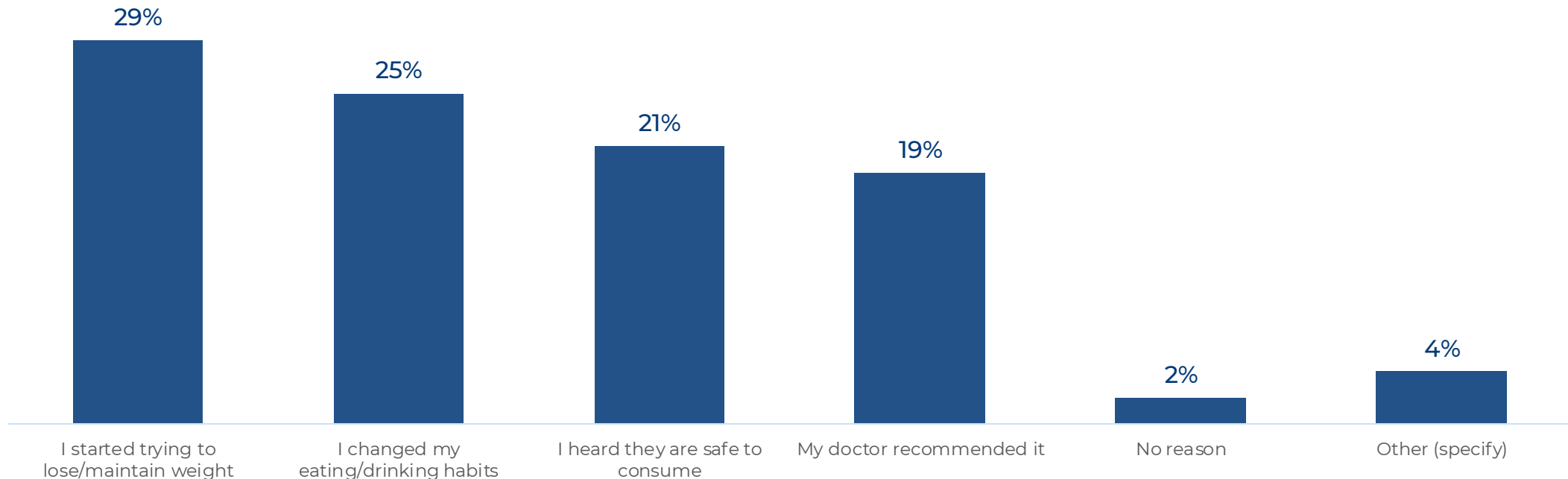
Of those who say they decreased or stopped consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners between April 2023 and April 2024, most did so as a change of habit.

Three in ten (31%) decreased or stopped consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners because they heard they are unsafe, while one in seven (14%) did so because their doctor recommended it.



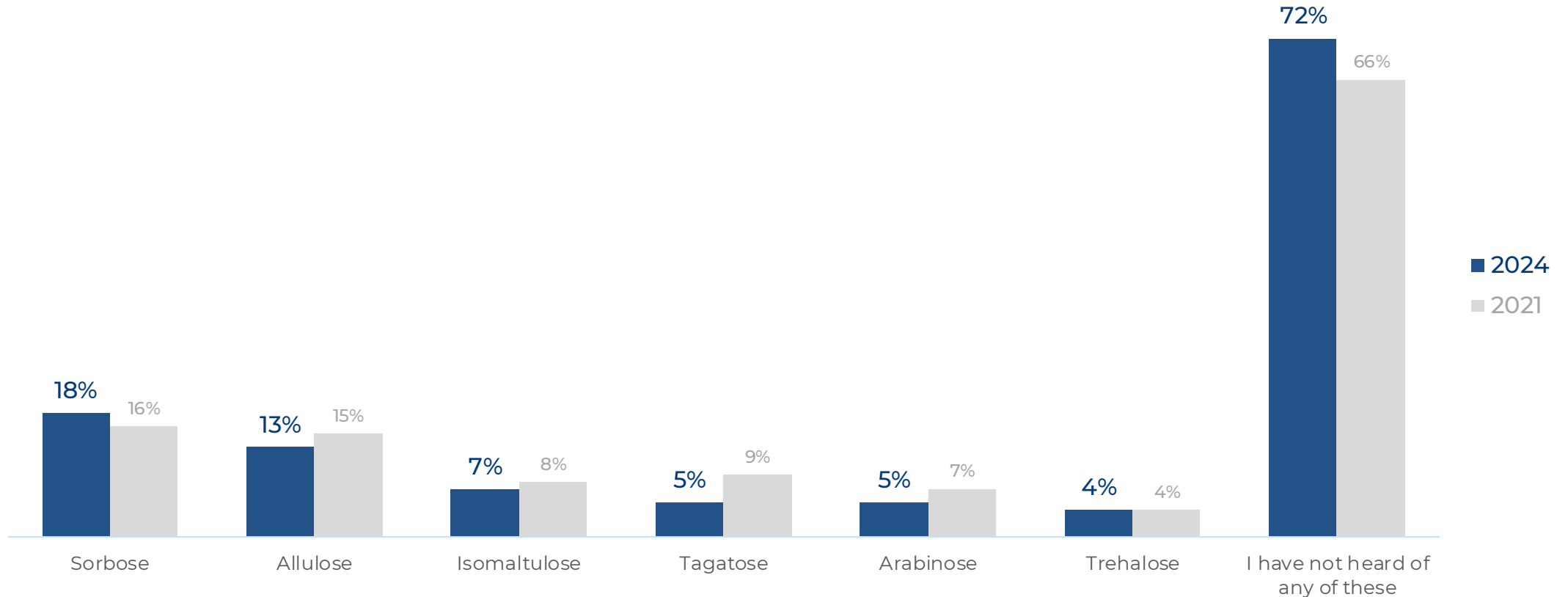
Of those who say they increased or started consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners between April 2023 and April 2024, most did so to manage body weight.

While one-quarter increased or started consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners as a change of habit (25%), one in five did so because they heard they are safe (21%) or because their doctor recommended it (19%).



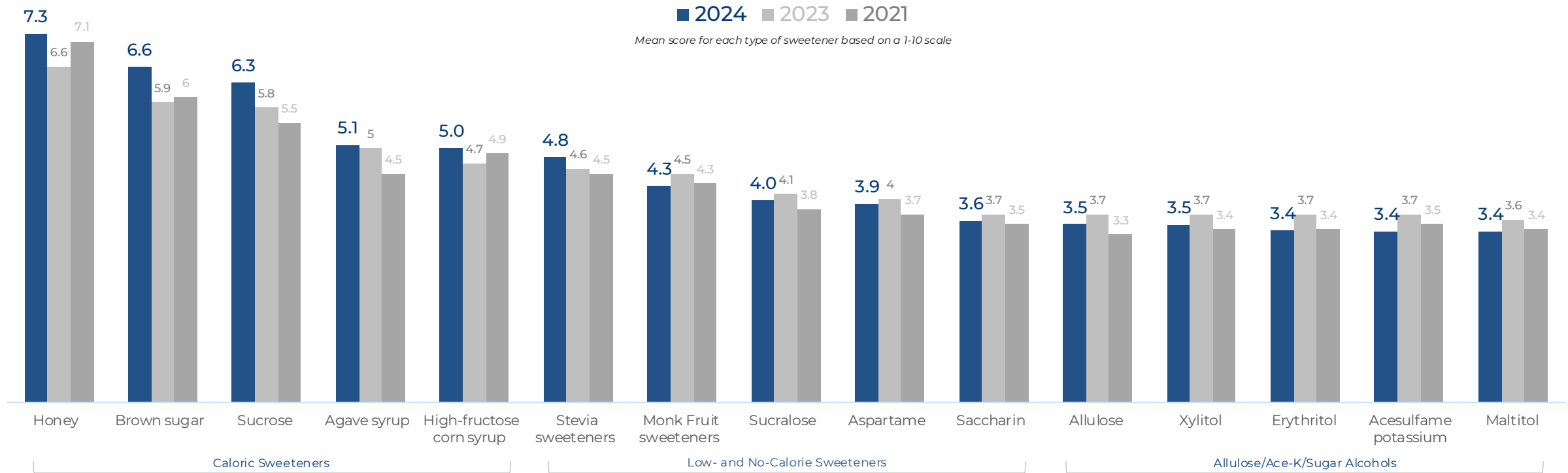
Most Americans have not heard of allulose.

One in eight (13%) have heard of allulose, a similar percentage as found in 2021.



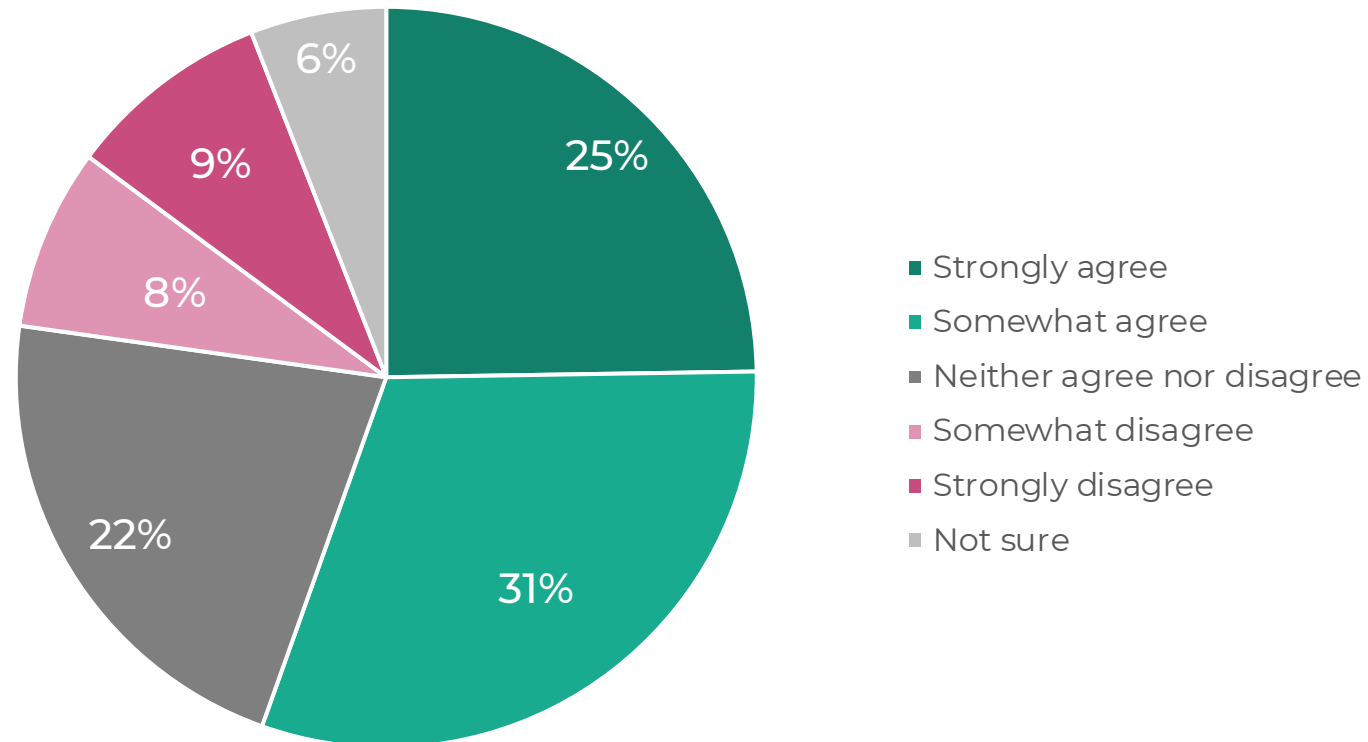
Americans say they are more likely to consume foods and beverages with sugars than those with low- and no-calorie sweeteners, allulose, or sugar alcohols.

Honey is rated as the most likely to be consumed caloric sweetener. Stevia is rated as the most likely to be consumed low- and no-calorie sweetener.



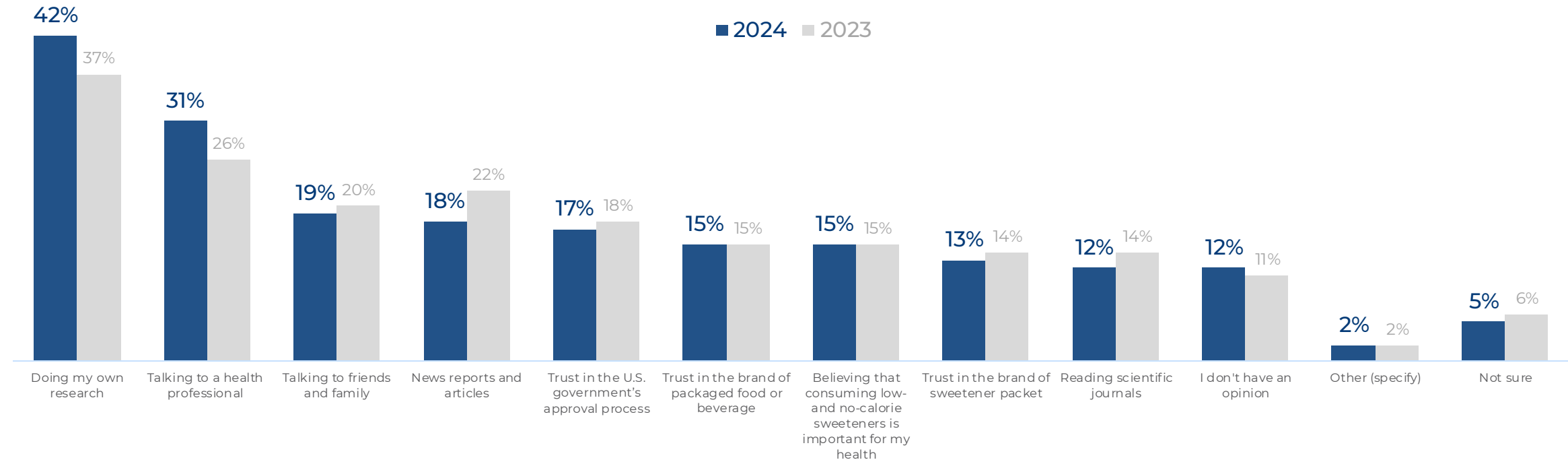
More than half of Americans agree that consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners can benefit the health of some people.

Nearly one in four are either unsure (6%) or disagree (17%) that low- and no-calorie sweeteners can benefit the health of some people.



Most Americans say they inform their opinion about the safety of consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners by doing their own research.

Three in ten (31%) inform their opinion by talking to a health professional, while fewer rely on friends/family (19%), news reports and articles (18%), and/or their trust in the U.S. government’s approval process (17%).

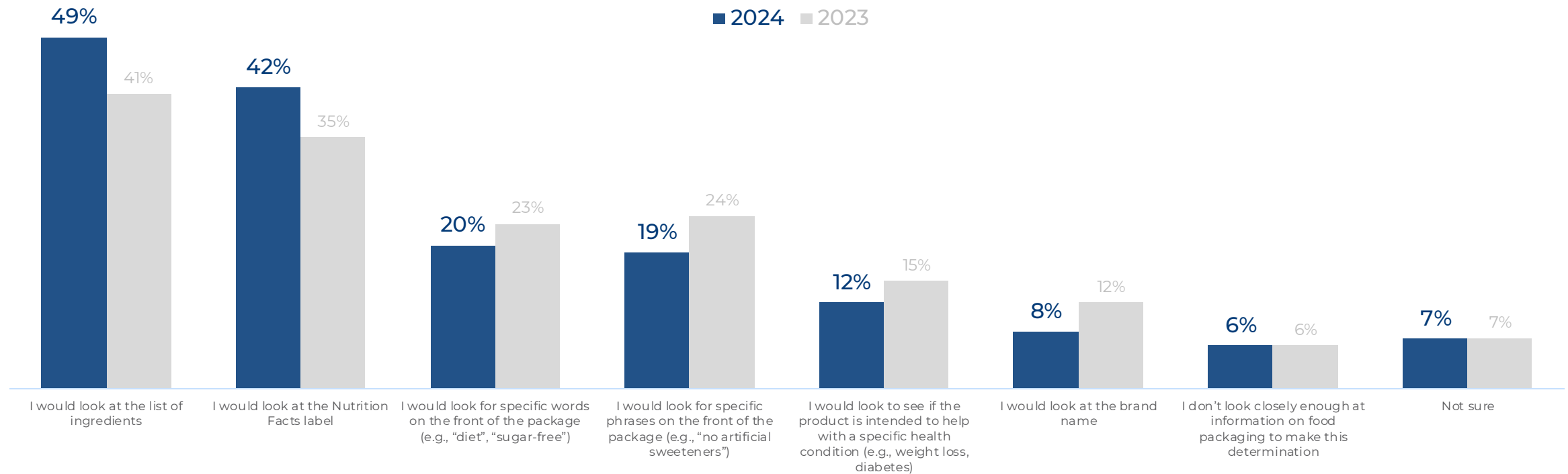


Q8. What informs your opinion of the safety of consuming low- and no-calorie sweeteners? Select top 3. (n= 1000)
**This question was asked in IFIC's 2023 and 2024 Sweeteners Surveys*

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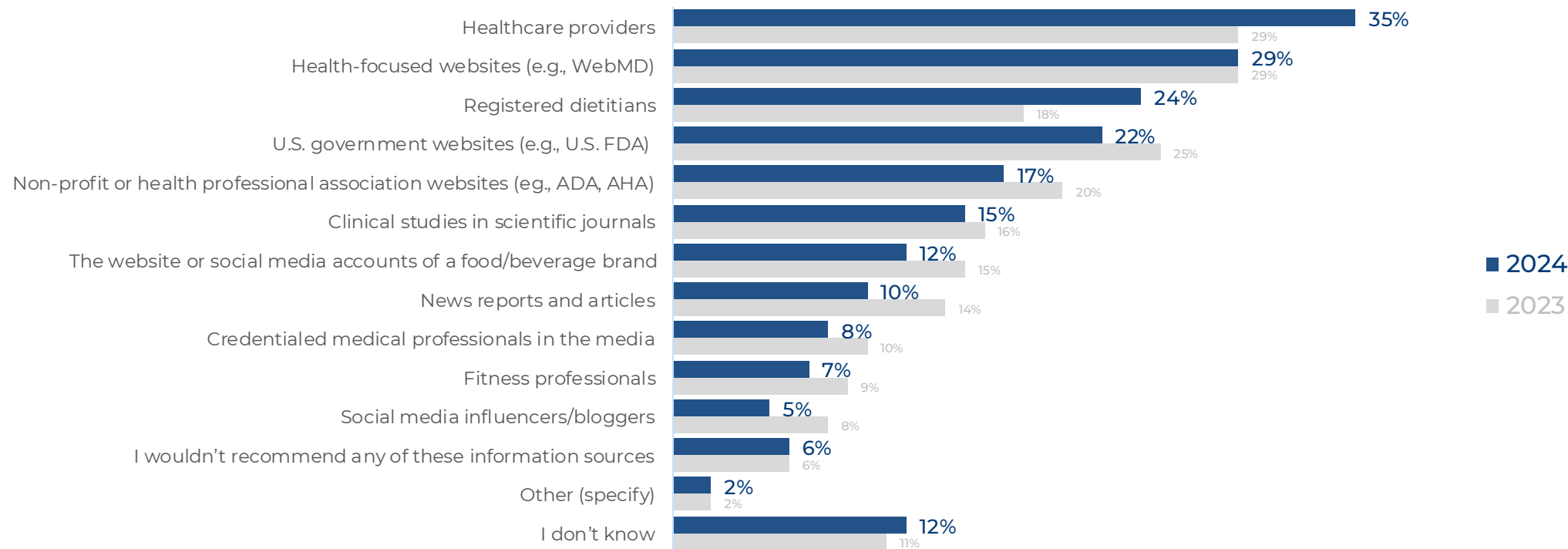
Most Americans say they would consult the ingredients list and the Nutrition Facts label to determine if a packaged food or beverage contains low- or no-calorie sweeteners.

Two in ten would look for specific words (20%) or phrases (19%) on the front of food and beverage packaging.



Healthcare providers and health-focused websites are the top sources that people would recommend to friends and family to learn more about low- and no-calorie sweeteners.

More than two in ten would recommend registered dietitians (24%) and/or U.S. government websites (22%), while fewer than half as many would point their friends and family to news reports and articles (10%).





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