



**SPOTLIGHT
SURVEY**

Americans' Perceptions & Priorities on Healthy Eating

March 2025



METHODOLOGY



The International Food Information Council (IFIC) commissioned an online survey among U.S. consumers to measure knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about eating healthy. One thousand adults ages 18 years and older completed the online survey from December 5-10, 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). IFIC Spotlight Survey: Americans' Perceptions & Priorities on Healthy Eating. March 2025.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many habits are associated with good health. But which is the most important? When Americans were asked to rank the top actions people can take to be healthy, diet and exercise rose to the top with more than half ranking exercise (59%) and eat a balanced diet (58%) in their top three. Twenty-two percent ranked them each as the most important action, with men being more likely than women to say exercise is most important (28% vs. 17%) and women being more likely than men to say eating a balanced diet is most important (26% vs. 17%). Diet and exercise were followed by reduce stress (10%), get 8 hours of sleep each day (9%), visit your doctor regularly (9%), self-care (8%), and drink 8 cups of water each day (7%).

Part of changing a habit is awareness of the existing habit. When we asked survey takers how often they think about how healthy their diet is, 7% said they never think about it. Conversely, slightly more than 1 in 10 (12%) said they think about it every time they eat or drink.

The action phase of implementing behavior change often includes advanced planning. To maintain a healthy diet, survey takers believe that spending more time preparing and cooking meals (41%) or more time planning meals (40%) play bigger roles than spending more time grocery shopping (10%) or spending more money grocery shopping (8%).

Lasting behavior change takes more than knowledge. When it comes to food, the way we think about food can influence our relationship with food and the likelihood of adopting a healthy eating routine. More than half of survey takers think food is “fuel” (62%), “delicious” (60%), and “health” (56%). Emotions are part of the equation as well, with 37% selecting “food is love,” “joy” (32%), and “connection” (22%). Nearly 1 in 4 (28%) selected “food is medicine” and even fewer selected “food is easy” (18%). Effective nutrition education must build upon how people feel about healthy eating behaviors and creating environments that make healthy eating easier, enjoyable, automatic, and habitual.

IFIC commissioned this *IFIC Spotlight Survey, Americans’ Perceptions & Priorities on Healthy Eating* to study what U.S. consumers think and do about eating healthy.



KEY FINDINGS

Most Americans say exercising or eating a balanced diet is the most important action people can take to be healthy.

More than 4 in 10 survey takers say that exercise (22%) or eating a balanced diet (22%) is the most important action people can take to be healthy. Interestingly, men are more likely than women to say exercise is most important (28% vs. 17%), whereas women are more likely than men to say eating a balanced diet is most important (26% vs. 17%). After diet and exercise, survey takers say reducing stress (10%), getting 8 hours of sleep each day (9%), and visiting your doctor regularly (9%) are most important for being healthy.

1 in 4 Americans do not think about how healthy their diet is very often.

Survey takers were asked how often they think about how healthy their diet is on a 5-point scale (1 = “every time I eat or drink” and 5 = “never”). Seven percent said they never think about how healthy their diet is and 19% said they think about it a little more often than never (i.e., 4 on the 5-point scale). More than 1 in 10 (12%) said they think about how healthy their diet is every time they eat or drink. Fourteen percent of men earning <\$40K per year say they never think about how healthy their diet is.

To eat healthy, time spent planning, preparing, and cooking is considered more essential than spending more money.

Overwhelmingly, survey takers say that spending more time preparing and cooking meals (41%) or more time planning meals (40%) play bigger roles in healthy eating than spending more time grocery shopping (10%) or more money on foods and beverages (8%).

Americans say their health, budget, and preferences have the most influence on *what* and *how* they eat and drink.

While personal preferences, budgets, and health needs are leading drivers of what and how Americans eat, fewer cite their job, religion, beliefs, or ethnicity as having the most influence.

KEY FINDINGS

Most Americans would first look at the Nutrition Facts label or the ingredients list to quickly check if a packaged food or beverage is healthy.

The first thing survey takers said they would do to quickly check if a food or beverage is healthy was look at the Nutrition Facts label (38%) or look at the Ingredients list (29%). Far fewer said they would first look at the price (11%), information on the front of the package (10%), Use by/Best By/Best If Used By dates (6%), online/apps (3%), while 4% said they would not look for this type of information.

By age, more survey takers age 45+ years (43%) said they would first check the Nutrition Facts label than those under age 45 years (32%).

More than half of Americans think about food as fuel and flavor, followed by health.

When survey takers were asked how they think about food, more than half selected “food is fuel” (62%), “food is delicious” (60%) or “food is health” (56%). The top three was followed by “food is joy” (37%) and “food is love” (32%). Slightly fewer selected “food is medicine” (28%), “food is food” (27%), “food is connection” (22%), or “food is easy” (18%).

3 in 4 Americans agree that “food is medicine.”

Survey takers were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement, “Food is medicine.” Nearly 3 in 4 strongly (35%) or somewhat (38%) agree while 1 in 10 somewhat (6%) or strongly (3%) disagree. Two in 10 survey takers (18%) neither agree nor disagree that “food is medicine.”

By age, more survey takers under age 45 years strongly agree with the statement, “Food is medicine” than those age 65+ years (24%).

IMPLICATIONS

Eating healthy is one of the most important things we can do for our wellbeing. A well-balanced diet nourishes our body, mind, and soul, and reduces the risk of developing chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes, and obesity. Despite the numerous well-known benefits of eating healthy, it remains difficult for many. Budgets, behaviors, time, taste preferences, habits, and health needs can be tough to balance. In addition, many Americans struggle with kitchen skills and limited availability and access to healthy food.

The [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) has been published every five years since 1980. According to the [2024 IFIC Food & Health Survey](#), 88% of Americans say they have heard of the Dietary Guidelines. However, only 9% say they know a lot about them, and even fewer follow them. Currently, the mean [Healthy Eating Index](#) (HEI-2020) score of the American diet is 58 out of 100.

[National Nutrition Month](#)® and “[Food Is Medicine](#)” are examples of initiatives that seek to reverse these trends. National Nutrition Month® is an annual campaign of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics since 1973 that invites people to learn about making informed food choices and developing healthful eating and physical activity habits. “Food Is Medicine” initiatives focus on the connection between food and health, recognizing the importance of access to high-quality nutrition for wellbeing.

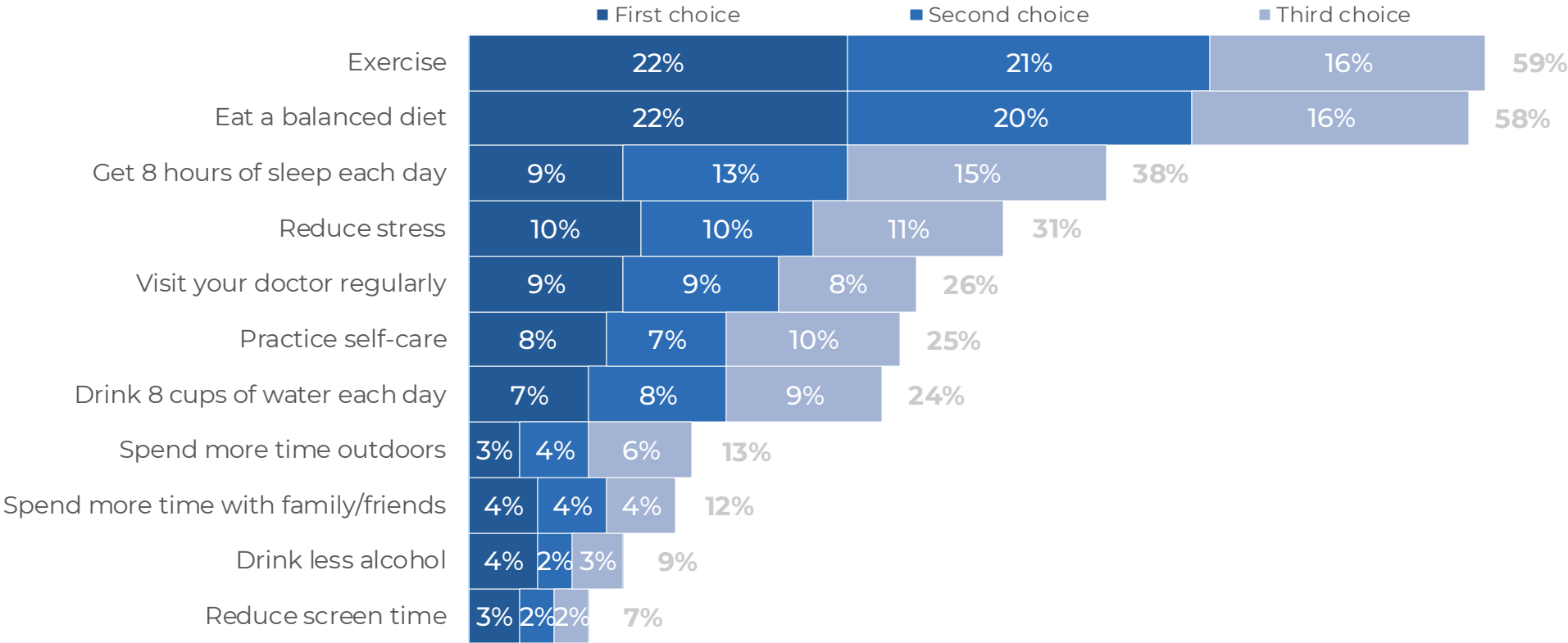
As conversations about healthy food continue to gain momentum, it is critical to remember that food is more than nutrition. Americans connect with food in myriad ways, including through emotions and beliefs, which illustrates the need to speak about food in language that can be easily understood and implemented. Explicitly connecting evidence-based nutrition recommendations to the food priorities and perspectives of Americans can make food advice more trustworthy and relatable, thus more likely to elicit lasting behavior change to improve our health and relationship with food. Even with its challenges, improving eating habits diet is possible if we can connect the right strategies with the right mindset.

Source: IFIC Spotlight Survey: Americans' Perceptions & Priorities on Healthy Eating. March 2025..



Most Americans say exercising or eating a balanced diet is the most important action people can take to be healthy.

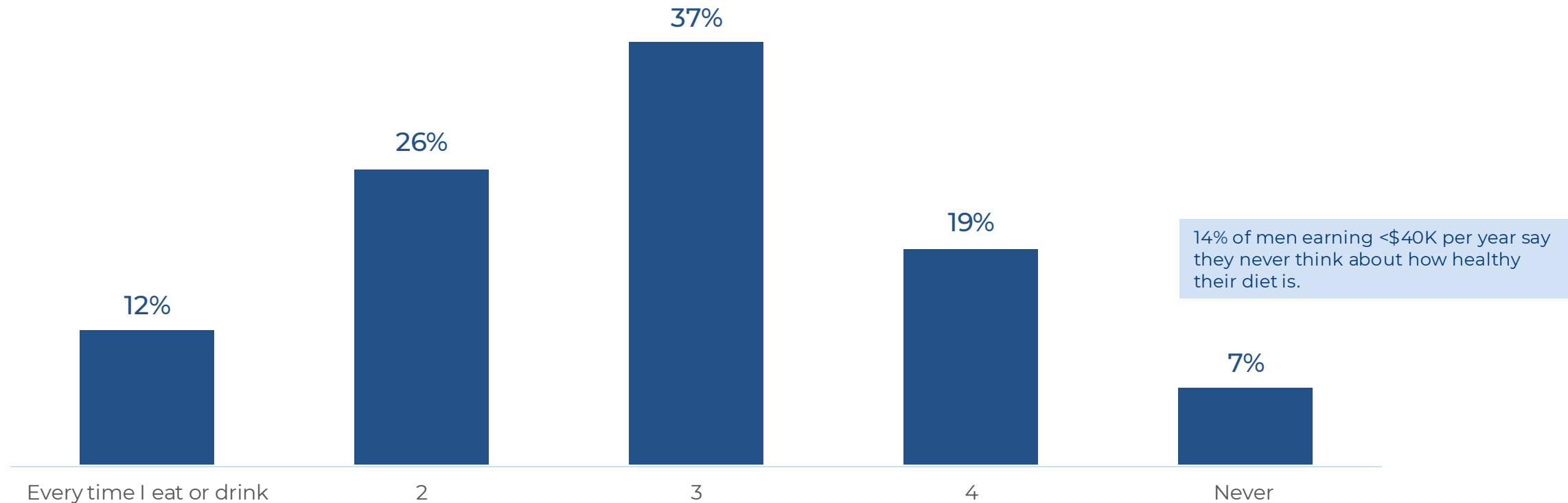
Men are more likely than women to say exercise is most important (28% vs. 17%), whereas women are more likely than men to say eating a balanced diet is most important (26% vs. 17%).



Q1. What do you think are the most important actions a person can take to be healthy? Choose your top 3, with 1 being the most important. (n=1000)

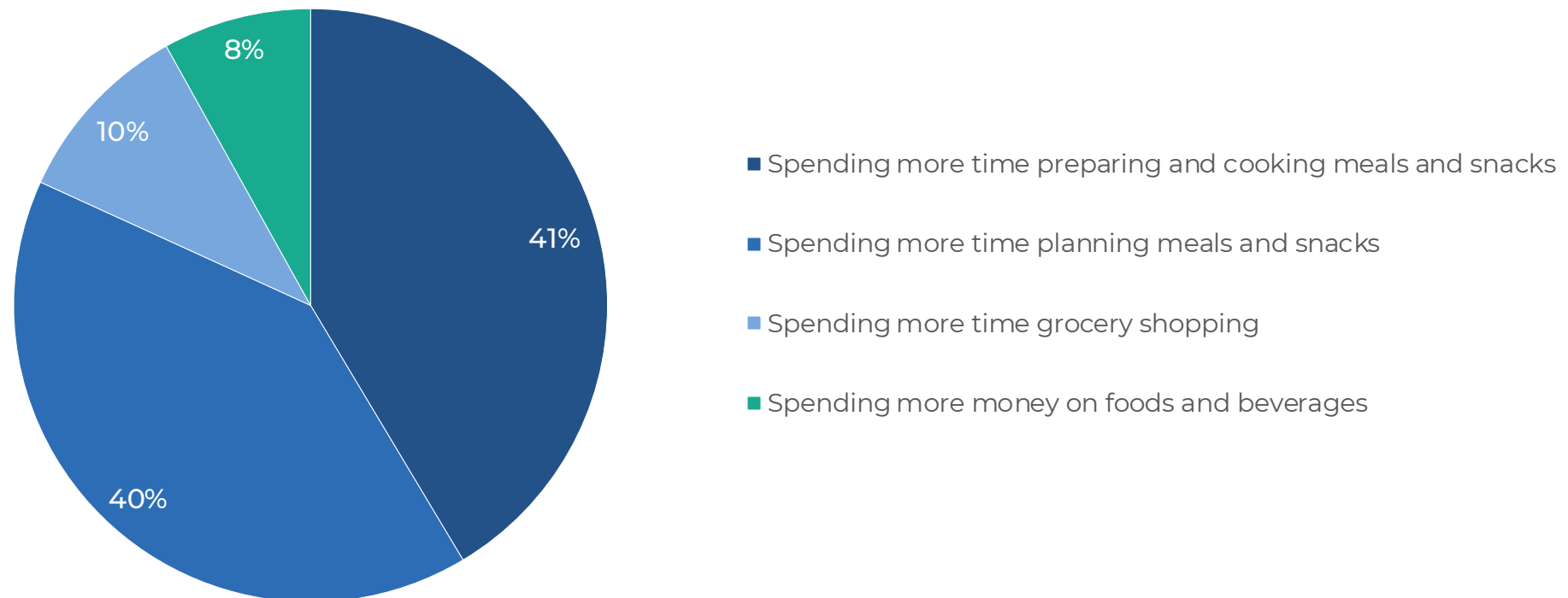
1 in 4 Americans do not think about how healthy their diet is very often.

12% think about how healthy their diet is every time they eat or drink and 7% never think about it.



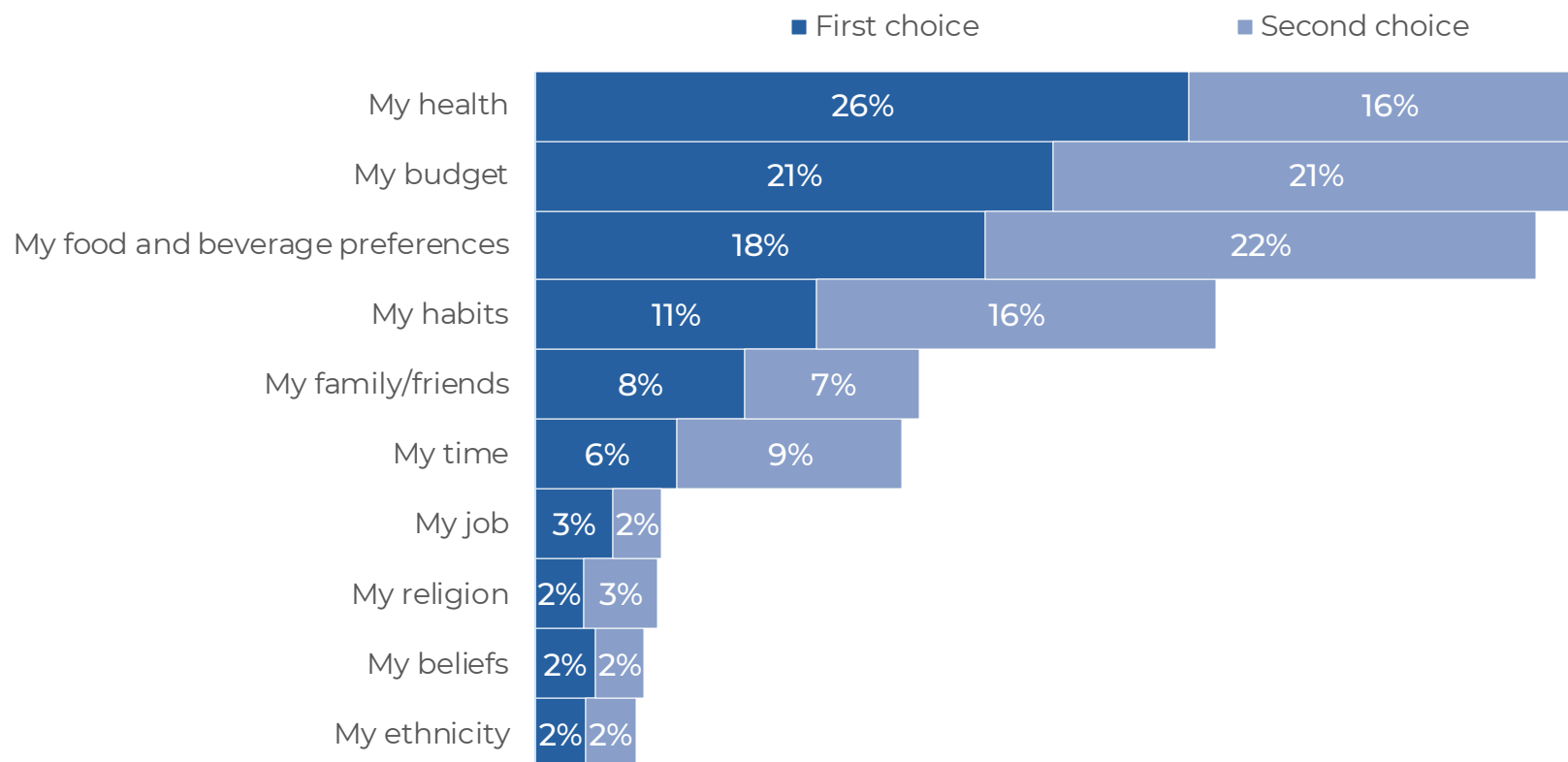
To eat healthy, time spent planning, preparing, and cooking is considered more essential than spending more money.

1 in 10 think spending more money (8%) or spending more time grocery shopping (10%) plays a bigger role in maintaining a healthy diet than spending more time planning or preparing and cooking.



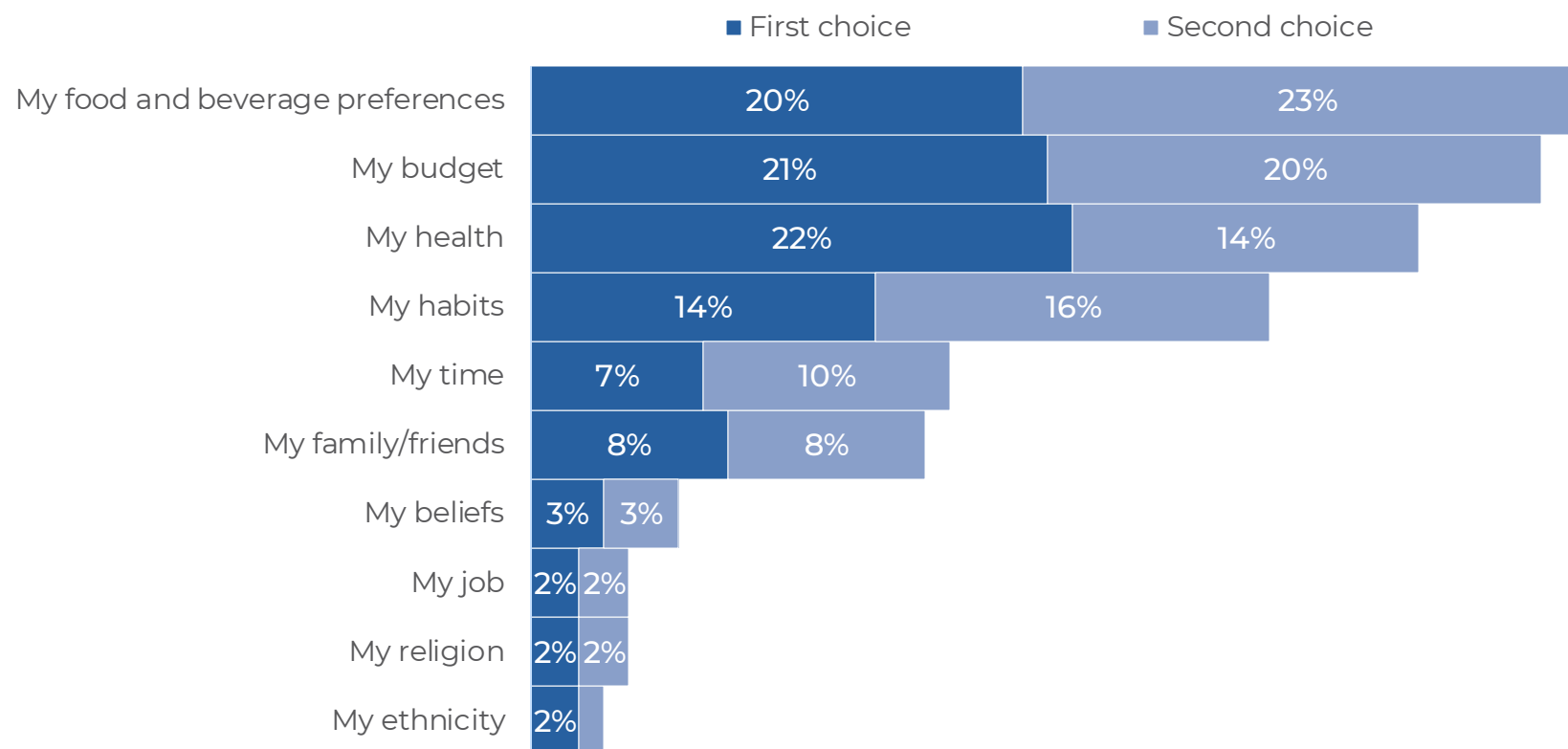
Americans say their health, budget, and preferences have the most influence on *what* they eat and drink.

Fewer cite their job (5%), religion (5%), beliefs (4%), or ethnicity (4%) as having the most influence.



Americans say their preferences, budget, and health have the most influence on *how they eat and drink*.

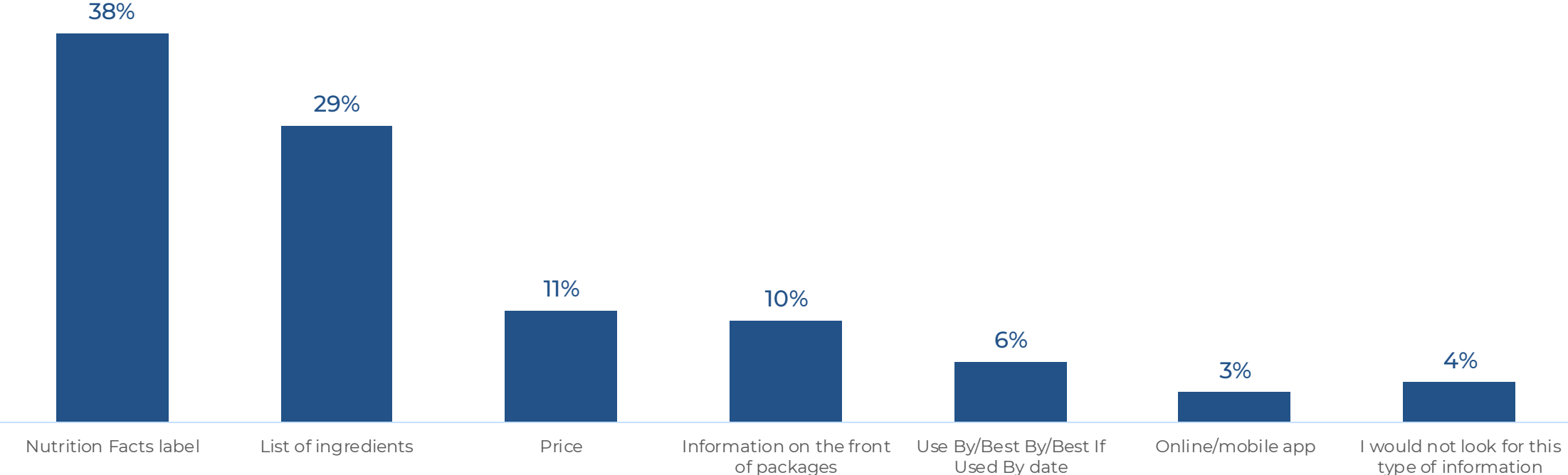
Fewer cite their beliefs (6%), job (4%), religion (4%), or ethnicity (3%) as having the most influence.



Most Americans would first look at the Nutrition Facts label or the ingredients list to quickly check if a packaged food or beverage is healthy.

Fewer Americans under age 45 years would first check the Nutrition Facts label (32%) compared to age 45+ years (43%).

Where Americans look first to quickly check if a food or beverage is healthy

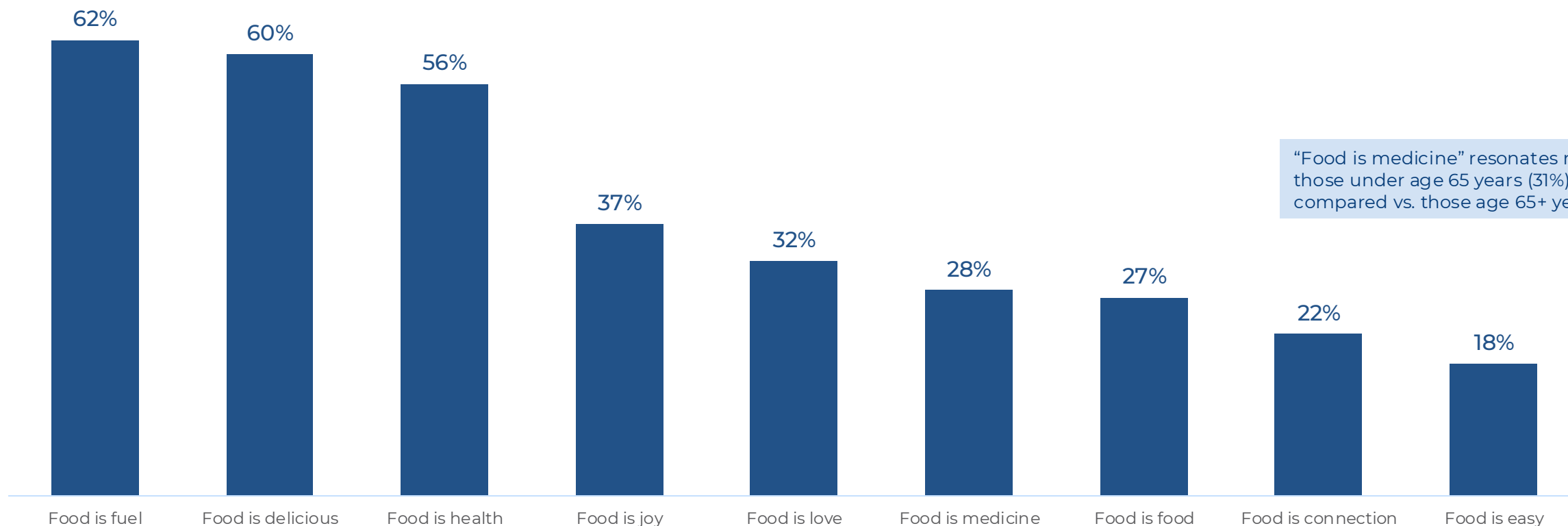


Q6. What is the first thing you would do to quickly check if a packaged food or beverage is healthy? (n=1000)

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More than half of Americans think about food as fuel and flavor, followed by health.

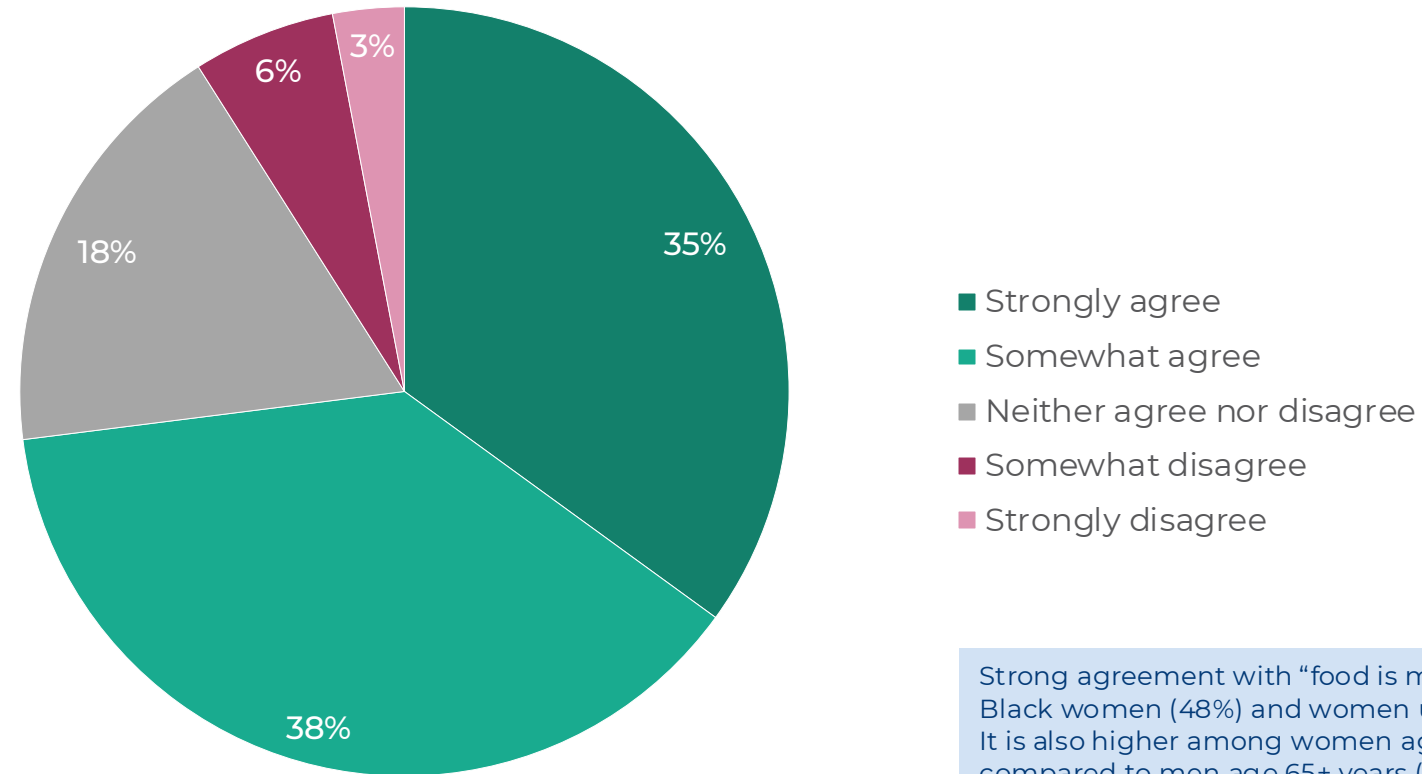
About 1 in 3 think food is joy (37%) and love (32%). Slightly fewer think food is medicine (28%), while nearly 2 in 10 think food is connection (22%) or easy (18%).



“Food is medicine” resonates more with those under age 65 years (31%) compared vs. those age 65+ years (20%).

3 in 4 Americans agree that “food is medicine.”

Strong agreement that “food is medicine” is higher among those under age 45 years (42%) than ages 65+ years (24%).



Strong agreement with “food is medicine” is highest among Black women (48%) and women under age 45 years (46%). It is also higher among women age 65+ years (29%) compared to men age 65+ years (19%).



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