



**SPOTLIGHT**  
SURVEY

# Americans' Perceptions Of Sweetness In Their Diets

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May 2025



# METHODOLOGY

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The International Food Information Council (IFIC) commissioned an online survey among U.S. consumers to measure knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about sweetness in their diets. One thousand adults ages 18 years and older completed the online survey from February 14-19, 2025, 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  $\pm 3.1$  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 Of Sweetness In Their Diets. May 2025.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Most people enjoy sweet-tasting foods and beverages, but our preference for sweetness is not by chance. From an [evolutionary perspective](#), humans developed an innate liking for sweet taste because it signaled safe, energy-rich food, like glucose from plants, while bitterness often indicated potential toxins. This biological preference begins early in life and supports infant acceptance of breast milk.

Results from this *IFIC Spotlight Survey* reveal a complex relationship between perceptions of sweetness, health goals, and food choices. Among the five basic tastes that humans can perceive, sweetness is the one Americans prefer the most. Nearly 6 in 10 (58%) survey participants prefer sweet-tasting foods, followed by savory/umami (49%), salty (45%), sour (24%), and then bitter (21%).

Despite the enjoyment of sweet taste, 8 in 10 (78%) Americans believe it is important to reduce the overall sweetness of their diet—highlighting perceptions of potential connections between sweet taste and health-related concerns. Among those who believe it is important to reduce the sweetness of their diet, the primary reasons are to eat healthier, manage blood sugar/diabetes, manage body weight, and dental health. Still, 6 in 10 (59%) believe that sweet-tasting foods and drinks can be part of a healthy diet.

Survey takers were asked what they would expect to change if they lowered the sweetness of their current diet. Top expectations include an increase in overall health (64%), eating a healthier diet (64%), consuming fewer calories (58%), and a decrease in body weight (55%). However, survey takers were evenly split on how they would expect their cravings to change; more than 1 in 3 (36%) would expect their cravings to increase if they were to reduce the sweetness of their current diet, while 36% said they would expect their cravings to decrease.

With many curious about the relationship between dietary sweetness and health, IFIC commissioned this *IFIC Spotlight Survey: Americans' Perceptions Of Sweetness In Their Diets* to capture current consumer perspectives.

**Source:** IFIC Spotlight Survey: Americans' Perceptions Of Sweetness In Their Diets. May 2025.



# KEY FINDINGS

## Of the five basic food tastes, Americans prefer sweet.

Among the five basic taste qualities that humans can perceive (bitter, salty, savory/umami, sour, and sweet), this survey found a preference for sweet-tasting food. Specifically, nearly 6 in 10 (58%) survey takers ranked sweet-tasting food in their top two, followed by savory/umami (49%), salty (45%), sour (24%), and bitter (21%).

## When Americans think about consuming something sweet, a specific food or beverage comes to mind first.

Survey takers were asked what they think of first when they think about consuming a sweet-tasting food or beverage. Most survey takers said they first think about a specific food (39%), followed by a beverage (23%), ingredient (12%), feeling (11%), memory (4%), event (3%), and life stage (2%).

## 6 in 10 agree that sweet-tasting foods and beverages can be part of a healthy diet.

Survey takers were asked whether they agree or disagree that sweet-tasting foods and beverages can be part of a healthy diet. In total, 59% of survey takers somewhat (35%) strongly (24%) agree compared to 15% who somewhat (10%) or strongly (5%) disagree. One in 4 (26%) are ambivalent about whether sweet-tasting foods and drinks can be part of a healthy diet.

## 8 in 10 believe it is important to reduce the overall sweetness of their diet.

Survey takers were asked about the importance of reducing the overall sweetness of their diet. In total, 78% of survey takers said they believe reducing the sweetness of their diet is either very important (33%) or somewhat important (45%). Far fewer said they believe it is not important to reduce the overall sweetness of their diet, with 17% saying it is not too important and 6% saying it is not at all important.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Among those who believe it is important to reduce the sweetness of their diet, the top reasons are to eat healthier, and/or manage blood sugar/diabetes and body weight.**

Survey takers who believe it is important to reduce the overall sweetness of their diet were asked why they feel this way. The most common reason was to eat healthier (49%). The next three most common reasons selected were related to health conditions: blood sugar/diabetes management (43%), body weight management (41%), and/or dental health (36%). About 1 in 3 said reducing the sweetness in their diet was important to feel better (34%) and/or heart health (30%), followed by to look better (20%), their doctor recommended it (15%), and/or to spend less money on food (13%). Women were more likely than men to believe reducing the sweetness of their diet is important for eating healthier (53% vs. 44%), blood sugar/diabetes (49% vs. 37%), body weight (48% vs. 34%), and dental health (42% vs. 31%).

**The top changes Americans would expect from reducing the sweetness of their diet are increases in health and nutrition, along with decreases in calorie intake and body weight.**

Survey takers were asked about changes (on seven variables) they would expect if they reduced the sweetness of their current diet. More than 6 in 10 survey takers said they would expect an increase in overall health (64%) and healthfulness of their diet (64%). Slightly fewer said they would expect a decrease in the calories they consume per day (58%) and body weight (55%). More than 4 in 10 said they would expect an increase in overall mood (44%) and satisfaction with their diet (41%). While more than 1 in 3 (36%) said they would expect an increase in cravings, the exact same percentage (36%) said they would expect cravings to decrease.

Interesting differences emerged between men and women. If the sweetness of their current diet were reduced, men were more likely to expect *increases* in calories consumed per day (25% vs. 14%), body weight (21% vs. 13%), and overall mood (49% vs. 40%), while women were more likely to expect the healthfulness of their diet to increase (68% vs. 61%). On the other hand, if the sweetness of their current diet were reduced, women were more likely to expect *decreases* in calories consumed per day (64% vs. 54%), body weight (63% vs. 48%), satisfaction with their diet (31% vs. 25%), and overall mood (27% vs. 19%).

# KEY FINDINGS

## Americans say that desserts and sweet snacks, candy, and fruit contribute the most sweetness to their diet.

From a list of 14 potential sources, survey takers were asked to select the foods and beverages that contribute the most sweetness to their diet. The top three contributors of sweetness were desserts and sweet snacks (53%), candy (49%), and/or fruit (41%). These were followed by sugar-sweetened beverages (36%), 100% juice (32%), coffee and tea beverages (32%), and/or breakfast cereals and bars (30%). Nearly 1 in 4 (23%) said that sweeteners they add to food and drinks contribute the most sweetness to their diet.

## Americans recognize the role of added sugar for sweetness more than sugar's other functional properties.

Survey takers were asked why they believe sugar is added to foods and beverages. Multiple options were provided in a select all that apply format. While 77% identify sweetness as a reason why sugar is added to foods and beverages, fewer than 1 in 4 believe sugar is added for its functional properties of texture (24%), extended shelf-life (21%), color (16%), fermentation (13%), moisture retention (11%), and bulk (9%).

# IMPLICATIONS

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Assessing the role of sweetness in a healthy diet presents a unique challenge. Sweetness can come with calories—often in the form of (added) sugars—or without, as in the case of low- and no-calorie sweeteners. While it is possible to quantify the sweetness of an individual food or beverage, evaluating the overall sweetness of a diet is far more [complex](#).

European researchers have explored our liking of sweet taste and the impact of dietary exposure to sweetness. A [2018 systematic review](#) found no consistent relationship between exposure to sweet taste and subsequent preferences or sweet food intake. A [2015 literature review](#) by Public Health England reached a similar conclusion. These research findings—that reducing dietary sweetness may not directly lead to decreased calorie intake and weight loss—stand in contrast to perceptions captured in this *IFIC Spotlight Survey* where 58% of Americans believe that reducing the sweetness of their diet would result in consuming fewer calories per day and 55% would expect it to lead to weight loss.

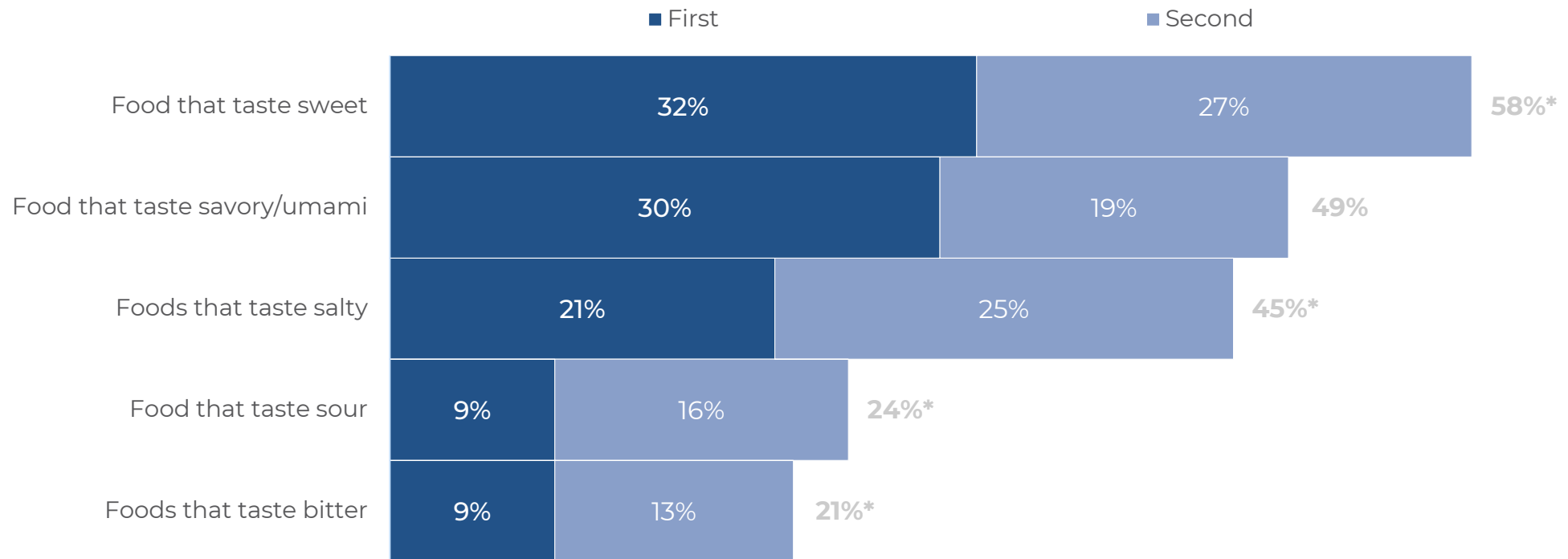
Sweetness alone is not always a reliable marker of [poor diet quality](#). Context matters—especially when high levels of sweetness can contribute to overconsumption of less nutrient dense foods that are high in calories from added sugars and saturated fat. This survey reveals a central tension: we like sweet taste, 59% believe sweet-tasting foods and beverages can be part of a healthy diet, and 78% also believe it is important to reduce the overall sweetness of their diet. Bridging this gap opens the door to food innovation to create less-sweet options that still satisfy and empowers health professionals to offer personalized guidance on enjoying sweetness within a healthy diet. The true sweet spot lies in harmonizing the pleasures of eating with the pursuit of lasting health.

**Source:** IFIC Spotlight Survey: Americans' Perceptions Of Sweetness In Their Diets. May 2025.



# Of the five basic food tastes, Americans prefer sweet.

After sweet (58%), Americans prefer savory/umami (49%), salty (45%), sour (24%) and bitter (21%) tasting foods.



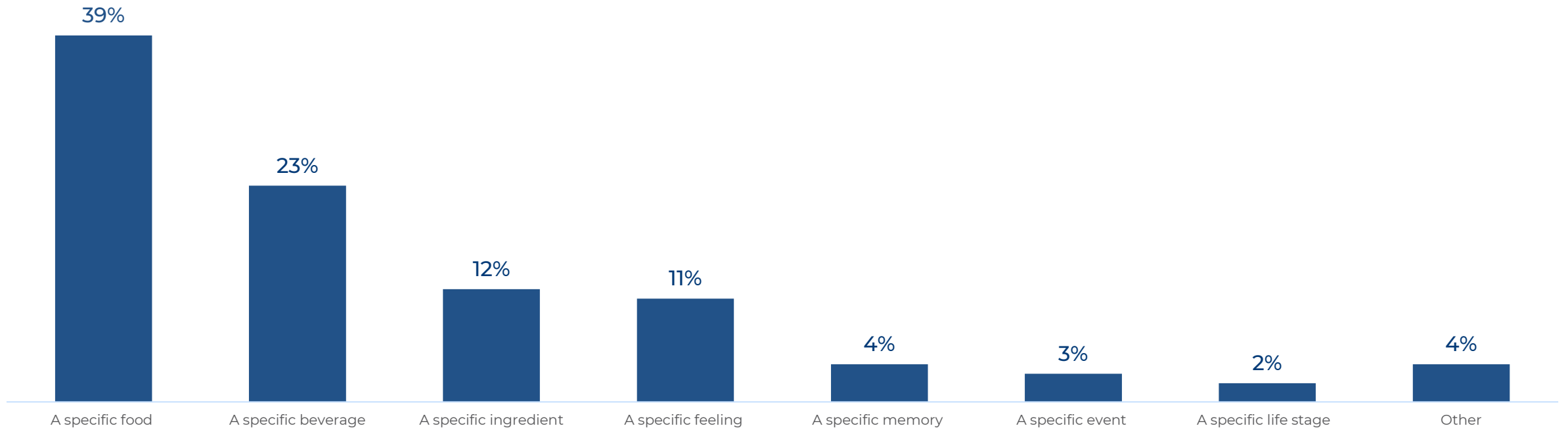
Q1. Which of the following foods do you like most? Select your top 2 with 1 being the one you like the most. (n=1000)

\*Does not equal First plus Second choice due to rounding



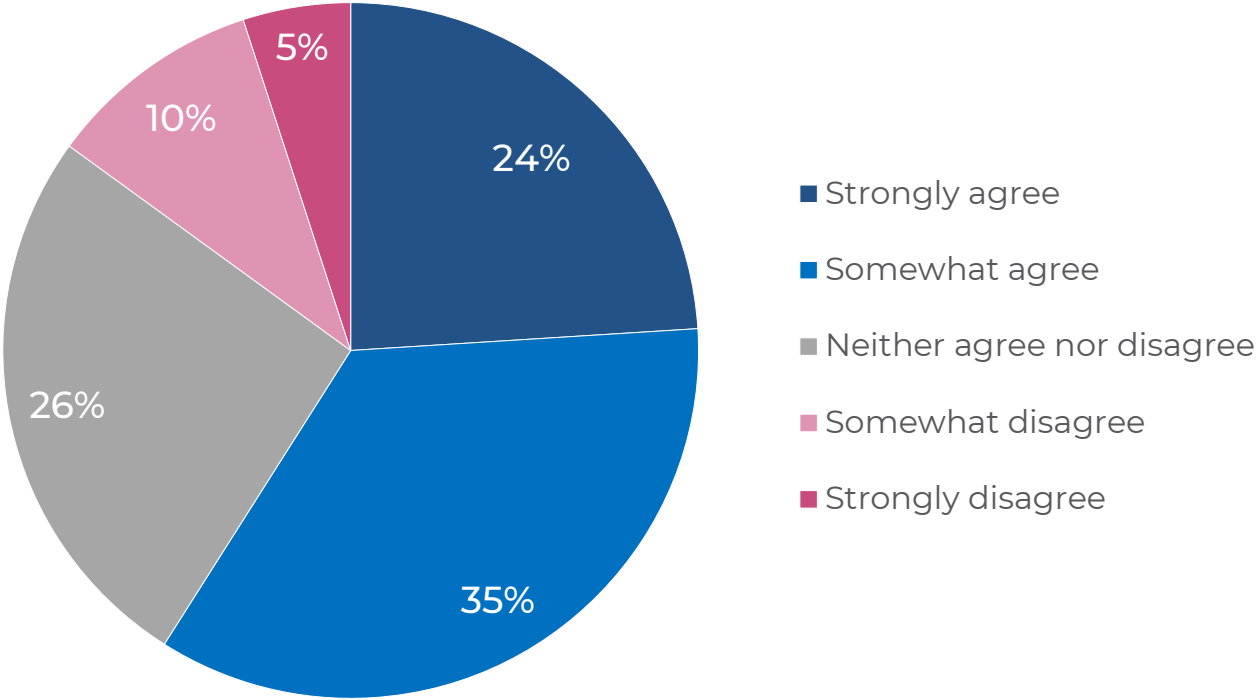
# When Americans think about consuming something sweet, a specific food or beverage comes to mind first.

Fewer Americans first think about a specific ingredient (12%), feeling (11%), memory (4%), event (3%), or life stage (2%).



# 6 in 10 agree that sweet-tasting foods and beverages can be part of a healthy diet.

While 1 in 4 (26%) are ambivalent about whether sweet-tasting foods and drinks can be part of a healthy diet, 10% somewhat disagree and 5% strongly disagree.

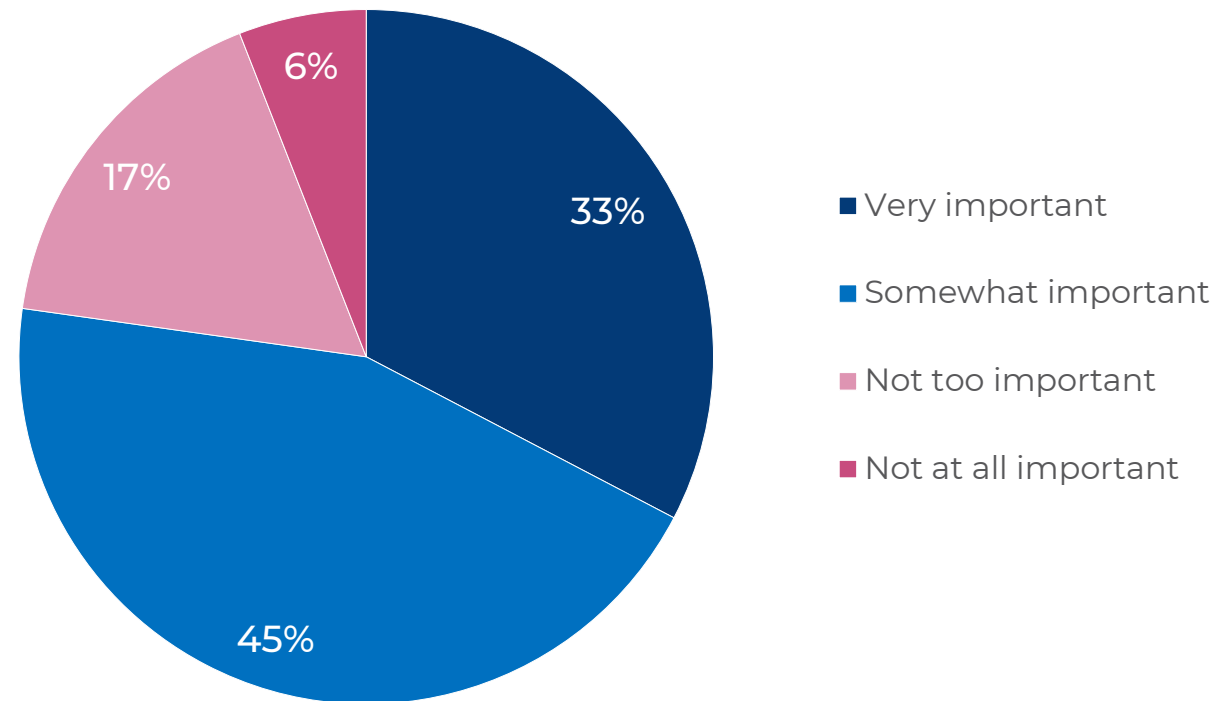


Strong agreement that sweet-tasting foods and beverages can be part of healthy diet is higher among:

- Men (28%) than women (20%)
- Those with incomes of \$80K+ (30%) and \$40K-\$79K (28%) than <\$40K (20%).

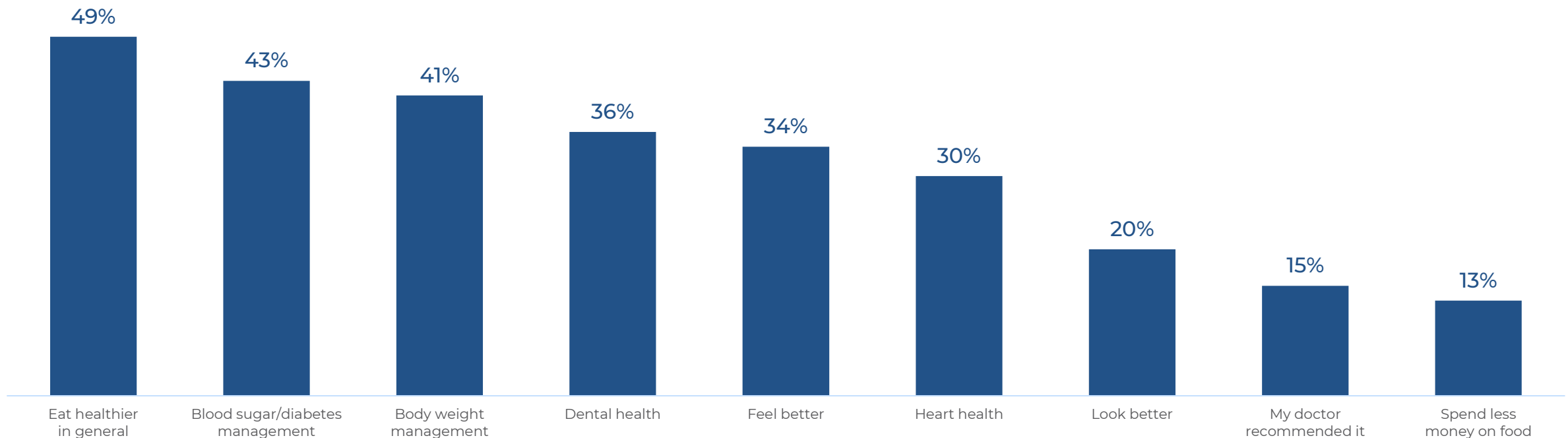
# Although 6 in 10 agree that sweet-tasting foods and beverages can be part of a healthy diet, 8 in 10 believe it is important to reduce the overall sweetness of their diet.

While 1 in 3 (33%) believe it is very important to reduce the overall sweetness of their diet, 1 in 20 (6%) believe it is not at all important.



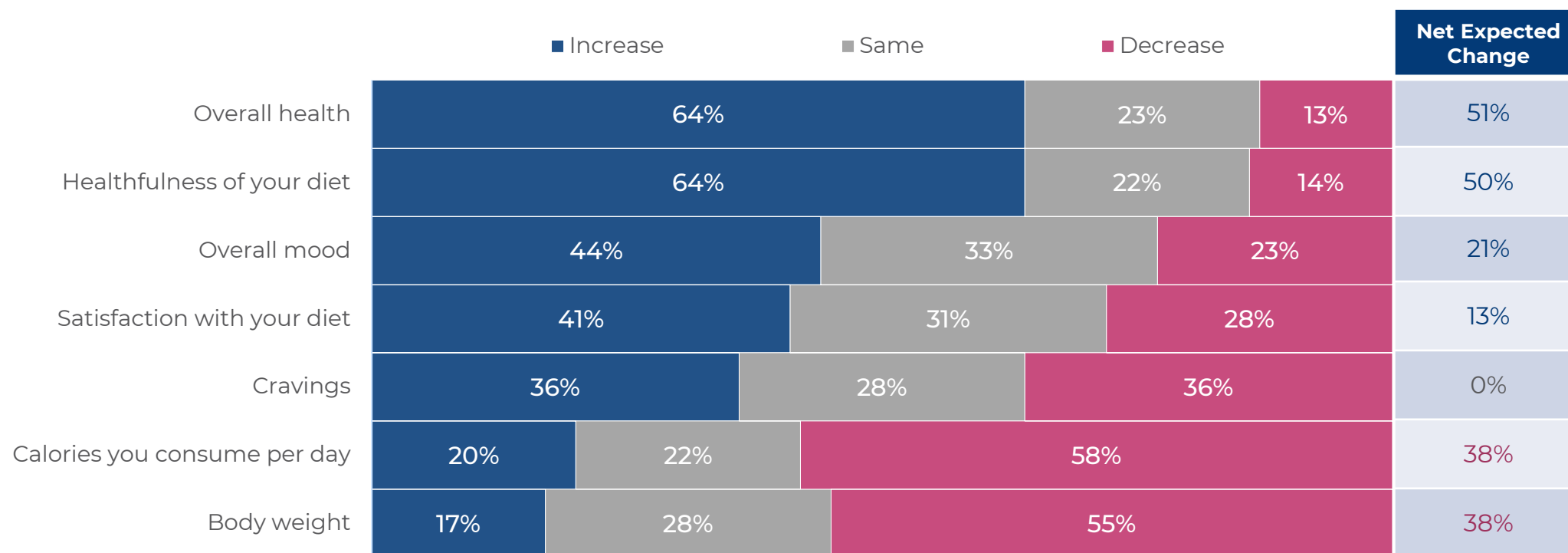
# Among those who believe it is important to reduce the sweetness of their diet, the top reasons are to eat healthier, and/or manage blood sugar/diabetes and body weight.

Women are more likely than men to believe reducing the sweetness of their diet is important for eating healthier, blood sugar/diabetes, body weight, and dental health.



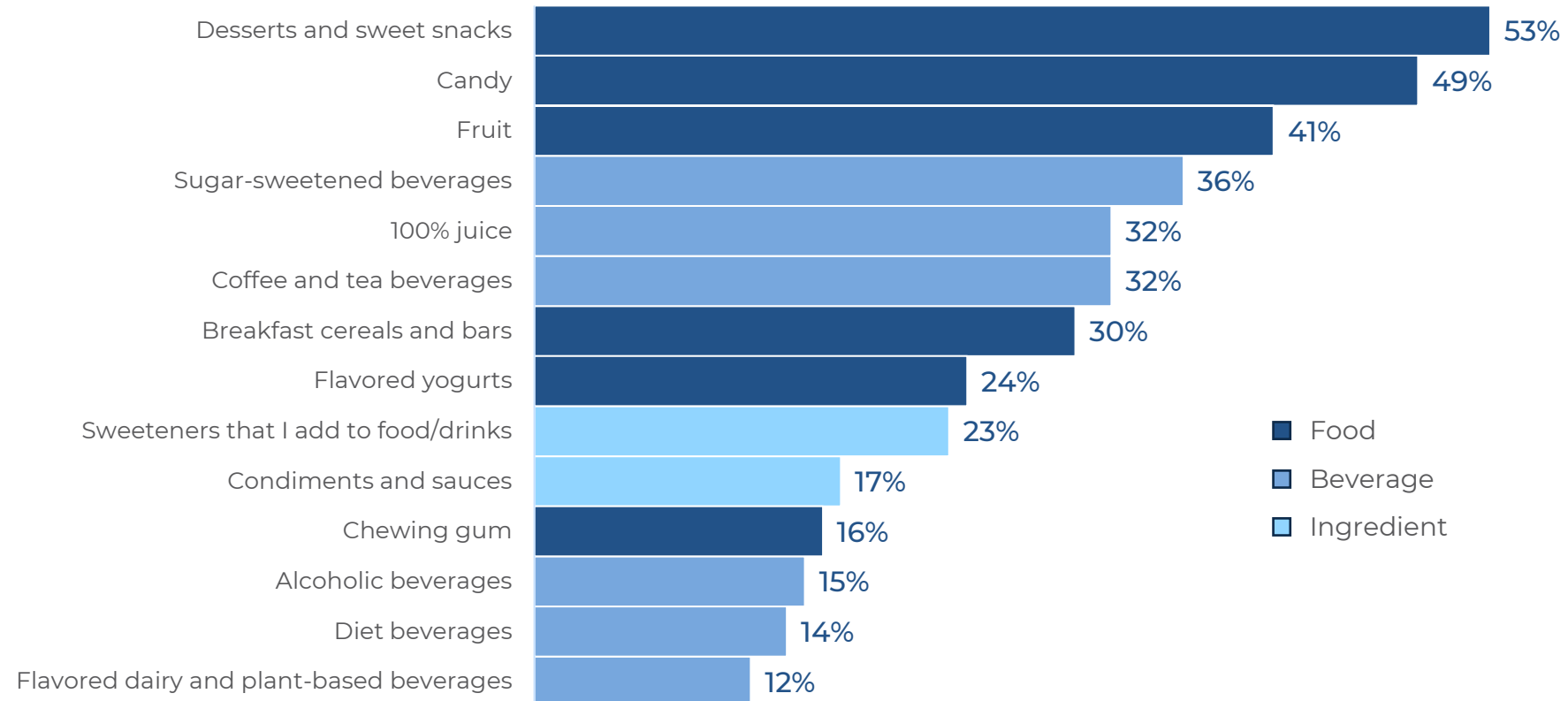
# The top changes Americans would expect from reducing the sweetness of their diet are increases in health and nutrition, along with decreases in calorie intake and body weight.

While more Americans expect increased mood and diet satisfaction from reducing the sweetness of their diet, there is an even split on whether cravings would change.



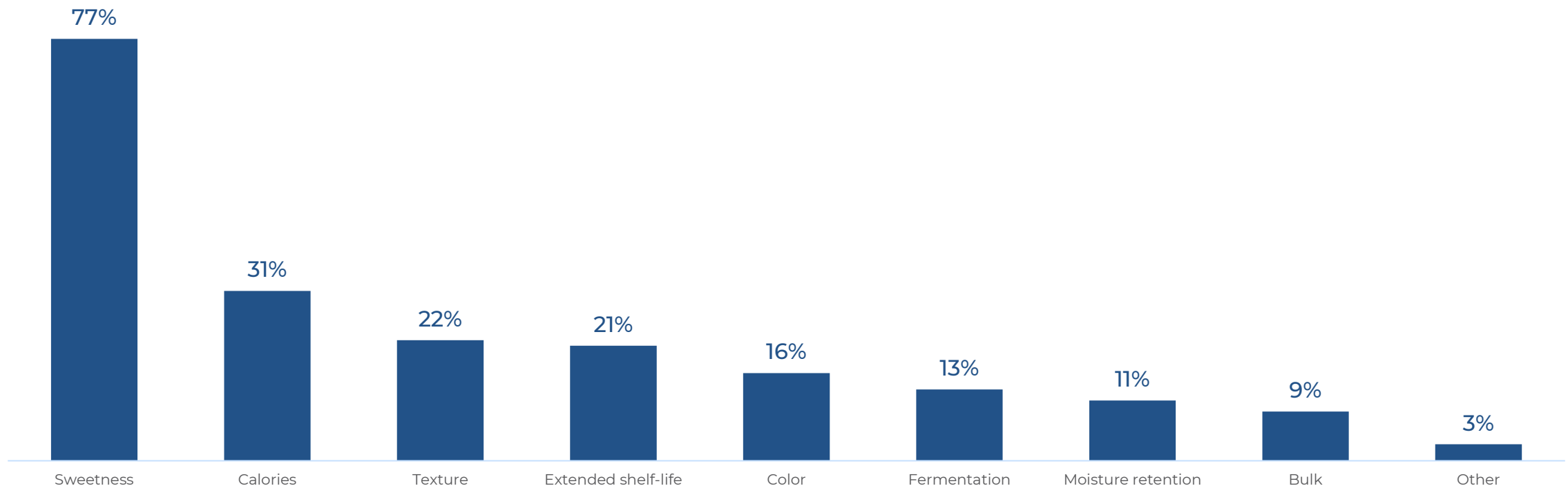
# Americans say that desserts and sweet snacks, candy, and fruit contribute the most sweetness to their diet.

About 1 in 3 say that sugar-sweetened beverages (36%), 100% juice (32%), and/or coffee and tea beverages (32%) contribute the most sweetness to their diet.



# Americans recognize the role of added sugar for sweetness more than sugar's other functional properties.

3 in 4 (77%) believe sugars are added to foods and beverages for sweetness, while fewer than 1 in 4 believe sugar is added for other purposes such as to extend shelf-life (21%) and/or retain moisture (11%).





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