



INTERNATIONAL FOOD INFORMATION COUNCIL FOUNDATION

# 2011 FOOD & HEALTH SURVEY

Consumer Attitudes Toward Food Safety, Nutrition & Health

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & KEY TRENDS

*The International Food Information Council Foundation 2011 Food & Health Survey takes an extensive look at what Americans are doing regarding their eating and health habits and food safety practices.*

## Price Approaches Taste as Top Influencer for Americans When Purchasing Foods & Beverages

*Yet, in a Down Economy, Health is Still Important to Two-Thirds of Americans*

The *2011 Food & Health Survey: Consumer Attitudes Toward Food Safety, Nutrition & Health*, commissioned by the International Food Information Council Foundation, is the sixth 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 gain insight on how Americans view their own diets, their efforts to improve them, how they balance diet and exercise, and their actions when it comes to food safety practices.

Although taste still prevails as the number-one motivator for food and beverage selections in general (87 percent) and in restaurants (69 percent; new to the 2011 *Survey*), in 2011 Americans are evaluating their food choices with a more critical eye, taking into consideration where their food comes from; how it was produced; its safety and reliability; food's overall healthfulness; and its cost.

As the US economy sputters, more Americans report that the price of food is a significant factor in how they are making food purchasing decisions. Seventy-nine percent of consumers say price impacts their decision when deciding which foods and beverages to purchase—a six percent increase from 2010 and a noteworthy 15 percent increase since 2006. Sixty-one percent of Americans also state that price drives their menu decisions at restaurants.

At the same time, Americans continue to have a heightened interest in their food. While price gained importance for American consumers in their food selections, in this environment, so too did healthfulness; Americans continue to be interested in learning about healthful food and positive food messages.

Consumers are receiving more information than ever about food, health, nutrition, and food safety. Impacting their decision-making process and beliefs about foods, the food and food safety environments have changed significantly in the past 12 months, with, for example, the release of the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans* and new food safety legislation. In this environment of increasing food and health information, Americans perceive themselves to be more healthful than in 2010.

Consumers want their food to be more than tasty and affordable; they want safe and nutritious foods too.

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 of Americans.

The following are key findings from the 2011 Survey.





### **Overall Health Status:**

Compared to previous years, more Americans (approximately half) perceive their overall diet as “somewhat” healthful. At the same time, while a majority of Americans are still making changes in their diet, fewer Americans report making dietary changes in 2011 (59 percent compared to 64 percent in 2010). Of the Americans who have made dietary changes, Americans continue to turn to family and friends for support (36 percent). But interestingly, just as many say that they have not turned to any resource in order to help them achieve dietary changes (36 percent).

### **Weight Management:**

Significantly fewer Americans are concerned with their weight status this year. Still, the majority (69 percent) of Americans is trying to lose or maintain their weight and cite these as strong factors influencing their decision to make dietary changes and remain physically active. Specifically, 56 percent of Americans report weight loss as a top driver for improving the healthfulness of their diet, and 20 percent report improving their diet to maintain weight. Although a significant decrease from last year, losing or maintaining weight remains the top motivator (25 percent) for Americans who are physically active. Improvement in physical appearance (51 percent) and increased self-esteem (43 percent) and energy (43 percent), followed by improvement in health /overall well-being (41 percent), are top motivators for those who are trying to lose or maintain weight.



## Calories and Energy Balance:

Similar to last year, few Americans (9 percent) can accurately estimate the number of calories they should consume in a day for a person their age, height, weight, and physical activity. Additionally, more than half of Americans are unable to provide an estimate of how many calories they burn in a day (60 percent) or offer inaccurate estimates (24 percent say 1000 calories or less).

When it comes to calories consumed versus calories burned, most Americans do not regularly keep track and 69 percent do not make an effort to balance the two – a significant increase from 2010. Forty percent of Americans are most likely to agree that calorie imbalance (more in vs. out) leads to weight gain.

Among those Americans who report currently trying to lose or maintain weight, the vast majority believe both physical activity and monitoring food and beverage consumption are equally important in weight management (70 percent). However, only 54 percent report actually implementing both strategies in an effort to manage their weight.



## Physical Activity:

More Americans this year report that their physical activity levels are sedentary (43 percent) – a significant increase from 2010 (37 percent). Among those who are active, slightly more than half (59 percent) do not include any strength training in their physical activity regimens. Further, a large majority of Americans (82 percent) are not meeting the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' *Physical Activity Guidelines*. Most express indifference about their physical activity level with equal numbers being dissatisfied and satisfied.







### **Food Technology & Sustainability:**

When asked about their awareness of the concept of sustainability in food production, nearly six in 10 (58 percent) Americans say they have read or heard at least “a little” about sustainability in food production. More than one-quarter (28 percent) of those Americans who have read or heard at least “a little” about sustainability in food production ranked “Ensuring a sufficient food supply for the growing global population” as the most important aspect of sustainability.

About four in 10 Americans (43 percent) believe that advances in modern food technology have provided or will provide future benefits for themselves and their families. Of those, about one-quarter say the greatest benefits are the ability to “produce more food using less land” (29 percent) and “preserving our natural resources” (25 percent). Furthermore, six in 10 (61 percent) Americans believe they have benefitted from modern food production and processing, with “improved food safety” (29 percent) and “food that stays fresher longer” (22 percent) emerging as the top benefits of modern food production and processing.



### Fortified Foods & Foods with Added Benefits:

Nine in 10 Americans (88 percent) believe that fortified foods and foods with added benefit have at least some impact on overall health. Four out of five Americans purchase a variety of foods and beverages, including milk, juices, eggs, yogurts, and cereal specifically because of an added benefit or fortification.

### Dietary Fats:

Americans remain confused and concerned about the types of dietary fats they consume. For example, 71 percent of Americans say they are trying to limit some type of fats. Sixty-six percent of Americans say they are trying to limit their consumption of saturated fats and/or *trans* fatty acids. But almost 20 percent say they are trying to limit polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats—the fats that nutrition experts recommend that people consume more of. When asked which dietary fats they consider to be healthful, nearly one in five Americans say they do not consider any fats to be healthful. And when asked whether Americans understood current dietary guidance to limit solid fats, less than one percent of Americans correctly identified the six fats considered to be solid according to the Dietary Guidelines; nearly half of Americans were not even willing to venture a guess.

### Carbohydrates and Sugars:

More than half of Americans are trying to limit their consumption of sugars, with four in 10 trying to limit high fructose corn syrup. One quarter say they are trying to limit refined carbohydrates and 17 percent say that they are trying to limit complex





carbohydrates. Although Americans report trying to limit sugars in their diet, half agree that moderate amounts of sugar can be part of an overall healthful diet.

### Low-Calorie Sweeteners:

Approximately one-third of Americans (34 percent) agree that low-calorie sweeteners are an option for people with diabetes. In addition, about one in three Americans agree that low-calorie sweeteners can play a role in weight loss or weight management (29 percent), and can reduce the calorie content of foods (29 percent). An increasing percentage of Americans (34 percent) report a lack of knowledge about low-calorie sweeteners compared to previous years.

### Protein:

About a half of Americans are not trying to change the amount of protein they consume (39 percent are trying to consume more; 9 percent are trying to consume less). When examples were provided this year, two-thirds of Americans agreed that protein is found in animal sources (60 percent) and close to 50 percent of Americans also agreed that protein is found in plant sources (47 percent), a significant increase from 2010 (28 percent). One third of Americans agreed that protein helps people feel full, is especially beneficial as people age, and can help with weight loss.

### Sodium:

Despite significant attention focused on sodium in the *2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, other sodium-reduction initiatives, and the media, Americans' concern about sodium remains stable. Equal to 2010, a little more than half of Americans (53 percent) say they are very or somewhat concerned about their sodium intake. Six in 10 Americans regularly purchase reduced/lower sodium foods. Approximately half of all Americans say they would be interested in learning more about sodium, including the amount of sodium they should consume; how sodium can impact health; which foods and beverages contribute the most and least amounts of sodium to the overall diet; and what types of people should be concerned with sodium intake. This level of interest is consistent with 2010 responses.



### Caffeine:

As in 2010, the majority of Americans (69 percent) say they consume caffeine in moderation. More than half of Americans agree that caffeine has the ability to help you wake up/stay awake, and more than four in ten agree that caffeine can help increase energy (46 percent) and can be part of an overall healthful diet (42 percent). More than six in 10 Americans think children (64 percent) and pregnant or lactating women (62 percent) should limit their caffeine intake.

### Food Colors:

Approximately one in three (29 percent) Americans agree that food colors add to the appearance of foods. A slight majority of Americans (56 percent) understand that both natural and artificial food colors must be labeled on food packages, and nearly half (42 percent) agree that food colors must be reviewed and approved by the U.S. government before being added to food products.





### Food Safety:

One-half (51 percent) of Americans are confident in the safety of the U.S. food supply. However, while most Americans are confident and understand food safety is a shared responsibility, Americans are falling behind in regularly performing safe food handling practices. Although eight in 10 Americans report following safe food handling practices, the numbers continue to decline for washing hands with soap and water before handling food (79 percent in 2011; 89 percent in 2010; 92 percent in 2008). Also declining, fewer Americans report washing cutting boards with soap and water (71 percent in 2010; 84 percent in 2008). In addition, half of Americans (50 percent) do not use a food thermometer and 30 percent indicate nothing would encourage them to use a food thermometer. Foodborne illness from bacteria remains the most important food safety issue (50 percent), but the Survey indicated that imported foods (15 percent) and food allergens (8 percent) are also important food safety issues.



Three-fourths of Americans get their food safety information from the media; however when it comes to trust, the media, government agencies, health professionals and food labels are the top cited trusted sources for food safety information.

Sixty-one percent of Americans believe that imported food is less safe than foods produced in the U.S., citing less regulation as the top reason.



### Information Sources and Influences:

Americans increasingly say that they would rather hear what *to* eat (63 percent) instead of what *not* to eat. This interest in positive messaging rose seven percent since 2009 when the *Survey* last polled Americans on this sentiment.

Americans' awareness of the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* has increased (81 percent in 2011 compared to 71 percent in 2010). Still, 95 percent of Americans could not name another "healthy living" initiative beyond the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* or MyPyramid, such as First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* campaign. Three-fourths of Americans believe they have seen some information about the *Dietary Guidelines*, citing a wide range of sources from food and beverage package to doctor's office.



### Food Labeling:

Similar to previous years, Americans say they are actively using the Nutrition Facts panel on food and beverage packages along with the expiration date, brand name and package size. Even though less than 20 percent of Americans report using the country of origin labeling, health symbol, or allergen labeling, the use has risen significantly over the past two years. When asked which specific elements Americans use on the Nutrition Facts panel, calories, fat, sodium, and sugars top the list. When asked what specific ingredients Americans are looking for in the ingredients list on food and beverage packages, about two-thirds of Americans list sodium/salt (65 percent), fat/oil (64 percent), and sugar content (60 percent). Additionally, Americans continue to increasingly look for vitamin and mineral content (48 percent) as well.



## Purchasing Influences:

While taste prevails and continues to be the main driver of purchasing foods and beverages in 2011 (87 percent), the price of food is increasingly becoming important for American consumers. In 2011, a majority of Americans (79 percent) says price impacts their decision when deciding which foods and beverages to purchase, a six percent increase from 2010 and a noteworthy 15 percent increase since 2006. While healthfulness (66 percent), convenience (58 percent), and sustainability (52 percent, new to the 2011 *Survey*) play roles in consumer decision-making, no other motivator has risen at the same rate as price over the past five years.



## Restaurants & Eating Occasions

Taste and price are the most important factors for Americans when deciding what to order in a restaurant. Seven in 10 Americans believe that calories on menus would help them in some way with selecting foods that are more healthful as well as make informed decisions about their diet. However, when thinking about the overall healthfulness of food in restaurants, Americans believe the total nutritional value is most important. Calories among other nutrient components were equally rated as important. When it comes to families eating together, regardless of setting, on average Americans eat about eight meals (7.91 mean meals a week) with their family each week, approximately one meal per day.

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







# METHODOLOGY

*The International Food Information Council Foundation Food & Health Survey provides ongoing insights into how consumers view their own diets, their efforts to improve them, their understanding of food components in their diets, and safe food preparation. The initial Survey was conducted in 2006 and acts as a benchmark study. Trending Surveys were conducted in 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011. Findings from this Survey can be used to guide and shape future education and communication initiatives, as well as trend data to measure the progress made toward achieving dietary guidance and effective consumer food safety practices.*

## Areas of Inquiry

The original *Food and Health Survey* focused primarily on how consumers approach overall diet, physical activity, and weight to manage their physical health. Other questions explored consumers' knowledge and attitudes toward principal food components such as fats, sugars, and carbohydrates. Finally, questions addressed consumer attitudes towards, and use of, information such as the Nutrition Facts panel and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's MyPyramid in making food choices. Since 2006, many of the original questions have been repeated with the following additions made:

- In 2007, questions were added to better understand consumers' knowledge and use of information about calories, and to explore consumer awareness and perceptions of low-calorie sweeteners and caffeine, benefits of foods that can contribute to physical health and well-being, and typical meal occasions.
- In 2008, questions were added to better understand consumers' knowledge and practices regarding food safety and safe food handling.
- In 2009, questions were added to better understand consumers' knowledge regarding information sources, behavioral patterns, food additives, and food irradiation.
- In 2010, questions were added to better understand consumers' knowledge and practices regarding calorie/energy balance, physical activity levels and motivators, protein, sodium, food shopping destinations, and consumer trust.
- In 2011, questions were added to better understand food technology, fortified foods and foods with added benefits, meal occasions and restaurants, and additional insights into motivators and barriers associated with calories and energy balance, weight management, and physical activity level.

## Methodology

This research was conducted by Cogent Research of Cambridge, MA. All data for this study were collected from March 28 to April 10, 2011 via a web-based Survey consisting of 113 questions. The subject recruitment e-mail list for this study was constructed to be reflective of the U.S. population on key U.S. Census characteristics, adjusting for groups with historically lower response rates. To ensure the final results were representative of the adult population in the U.S., the Survey data were weighted against the latest U.S. Census projections on specific key attributes. The data presented in this report reflect these weighted data.

Throughout this report, 2011 data are compared to the 2006 benchmark Survey (collected in November 2005) and 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 data. The 2006 benchmark *Survey* and the subsequent Surveys also utilized a web-based methodology and compiled a representative population of the

U.S. on key demographic variables. Statistically significant differences among 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 are noted in the report with up or down arrow keys (▲ ▼).

The findings presented here rely primarily on univariate analyses and cross-tabulations. All questions were cross-tabulated by a set of key variables, including primary demographic characteristics (e.g., age, income), health-based characteristics (e.g., BMI<sup>1</sup>, physical activity level), and attitudinal characteristics (e.g., satisfaction with health status).

A sample of 1,000 interviews is subject to a maximum sampling error of + 3.10 percentage points (at the 95 percent confidence level). Comparisons of data from 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, and 2010 to 2011 are subject to a maximum sampling error of + 4.4 percentage points (at the 95 percent confidence level).

<b>Methodology</b>	<b>Web Survey</b>
<b>Conducted By</b>	<b>Cogent Research (Cambridge, MA)</b>
<b>Population*</b>	<b>Representative Sample of U.S. Adult Population (18+) on Age, Socioeconomic Profile, Race/Ethnicity, Region, and Gender</b>
<b>Data Collection Period</b>	<b>March 28-April 10, 2011</b>
<b>Sample Size (Error)</b>	<b>n=1,000 (+ 3.10 for 2011) (+ 4.3 among 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007, 2006)</b>

\*Weighting is a widely accepted statistical technique that is used to ensure that the distribution of the sample reflects that of the population on key demographics. With any data collection method, even when the outgoing sample is balanced to the Census, some populations are more likely than others to respond.

<sup>1</sup> BMI calculated from self-reported weight and height and categorized according to U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) standards.



## 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, nutrition, and food safety for the public good.

Additional information on the Foundation is available on the “About” section of our website: [www.foodinsight.org](http://www.foodinsight.org).

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