

## IFIC Food & Health survey shows significant shift in consumer attitudes towards sugar, carbs

[foodnavigator-usa.com/Article/2018/06/08/IFIC-Food-Health-survey-shows-significant-shift-in-consumer-attitudes-towards-sugar-carbs](https://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/Article/2018/06/08/IFIC-Food-Health-survey-shows-significant-shift-in-consumer-attitudes-towards-sugar-carbs)



In its annual **food & health survey**,\* the International Food Information Council (IFIC) has asked consumers the question, *What source of calories is the most likely to cause weight gain?* for the past eight years.

The results show that when it comes to weight gain, attitudes towards protein and fat have not changed much. However, the big difference is that many consumers who were previously unsure, or who believed that all macronutrients are the same when it comes to weight gain (ie. 'a calorie is a calorie'... 'energy in, energy out'), are now pointing the finger at sugars and carbs.

Commenting on the findings - Lustig M.D., MSL, pediatrician, sugar-nemesis and author of best-selling book 'Fat Chance' - told FoodNavigator-USA: *"The percentage who said all calories were the same or didn't know totaled 64% in 2011 and 22% in 2018, a drop of 42%. Conversely, the percentage who identified sugar and carbs totaled 20% in 2011 and 58% in 2018, a rise of 38%.*

"There are two takeaways: One, despite the food industry's propaganda, people now understand that 'a calorie is not a calorie,' and two, the two macronutrients most identified with processed food (refined carbs, sugar) are now viewed as problematic. This is great news for food, although not so great for the processed food industry."

(Watch our recent video with Dr Lustig [HERE](#).)

### Q. What source of calories is the most likely to cause weight gain?

|                 | 2011 | 2018 |
|-----------------|------|------|
| • Sugars        | 11%  | 33%  |
| • Carbs         | 9%   | 25%  |
| • Fat           | 14%  | 16%  |
| • Protein       | 2%   | 3%   |
| • All the same* | 40%  | 17%  |
| • Don't know    | 24%  | 5%   |

#### Source: [IFIC food & healthy survey 2018](#)

\*In 2011, the 'all the same' option was phrased as, 'Calories consumed being higher than calories burned is what causes weight gain'

### 77% are trying to limit or avoid sugars

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More than three quarters of respondents (77%) said they were trying to limit or avoid sugars, and of those, 60% are drinking more water instead of caloric beverages, and 45% are "eliminating certain foods and beverages from my diet."

A third of those trying to limit or avoid sugars said they no longer added sugar to foods and beverages, while just over 20% said they were switching to low or no calorie beverage options.

However, 45% had a negative attitude towards low or zero calorie sweeteners (examples given were sucralose, aspartame and stevia leaf extract, so it's not possible to determine whether attitudes would have been different had these been split into 'natural' or 'artificial' categories).

As to the types of foods/beverages consumers looking to cut sugar said they were trying to reduce, soft drinks and candy came out on top. A significant minority of those avoiding/reducing sugar – 10% - said they were cutting down on 100% juice.

Asked about specific diets they had followed at any time over the previous year, intermittent fasting came out on top, cited by 10% of respondents, but low carb eating patterns were the next three most popular choices (paleo, gluten-free, low-carb).

### RD: There are both healthy carbs and healthy fats

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So what do nutrition experts make of this growing view that sugar and carbs (which include starches, sugars and fibers) are the nutritional bogeymen when it comes to weight gain?

Lisa R Young, PhD, RD, adjunct professor of nutrition at New York University, told FoodNavigator-USA that she wasn't surprised by the findings.

However, there can be a tendency to buy into simplistic 'black and white' narratives in nutritional science (fat is back, sugar is out) that don't help consumers manage their weight, she said: *"If sugar is bad, then fat is good. Increasingly, research has emerged on the negative health effects of sugar (for good reason), and consumers are catching on. This view, however, is only partially correct ... If sugar is 'bad' and contributes to weight gain, that does not make fat 'good.'*

She added: *"There are both healthy carbs and healthy fats, as well as unhealthy versions of both nutrients."*

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## **Fat has more calories than sugar**

As a gram of fat contains more than twice the calories of carbs (9 calories vs 4 calories), *"it is still important to watch your portions,"* she added.

*"Olive oil and nuts are great choices for dieters, but eat too much, and you may gain weight. I think nutritionists have less of a black and white philosophy about it and would argue that while eating too much sugar is indeed a problem, so is eating too much fat. At the end of the day, portion control still matters."*

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## **Hartman Group: Sugar is now being demonized**

Hartman Group VP retainer services Melissa Abbott, a panel member on our June 20 FREE webinar, **Chewing the fat: Navigating the healthy fats minefield**, said she too was not surprised by the findings.

*"Because Americans tend to operate under the guise that we must have a macro nutrient to collectively avoid in order to balance out the 'good' with the 'bad,' sugar is now being demonized. And with that, (healthy) fats are being cautiously considered as an ingredient that might actually do us some good, despite what we've been told for so long (fat makes you fat and can contribute to cardiovascular disease)."*

So what are the takeaways for food manufacturers?

*"Sugar avoidance is certainly in the midst of mainstreaming so product offerings should explore how to lower sugar grams while also exploring the level of processed carbohydrates in their ingredient panels. Good fats would fall into the emerging trend space so manufacturers would want to consider how they could provide a cleaner ingredient panel and potentially even leverage the type of healthier fat as a positive attribute on pack."*

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## **Catherine Adams Hutt: Higher protein diets are more satiating and can support weight loss**

While “*sugar is a carbohydrate friend without benefits,*” the conversation around carbs should be more nuanced, said Catherine Adams Hutt, PhD, RD, CFS, at RdR Solutions Consulting: “*Carbohydrate foods can include whole grains and dietary fiber.*”

She added: “*Where consumers have gotten the message and believe it, because it works, is that higher protein diets are more satiating and can support weight loss. We no longer believe that fat is the demon, and that just leaves carbohydrate as the macronutrient to reduce.*”

“*I support a move towards a diet that is high in protein (at least 20-30g of high quality protein at every meal) and moderate in carbohydrate.*”

## **Consumers struggle to link foods to health goals**

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When asked which health benefits consumers were most interested in getting from foods, cardiovascular health topped the list, followed by weight loss/management, energy, brain function, and digestive health. However, six out of 10 consumers surveyed could not name a food that would help them achieve the health goals in question.

## **Labeling reading**

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When it comes to label-reading habits and health or environmental attributes, consumers surveyed said they were far more likely to pay attention to such matters when grocery shopping than eating out, with the exception of local sourcing, which was of interest when making menu selections in restaurants.

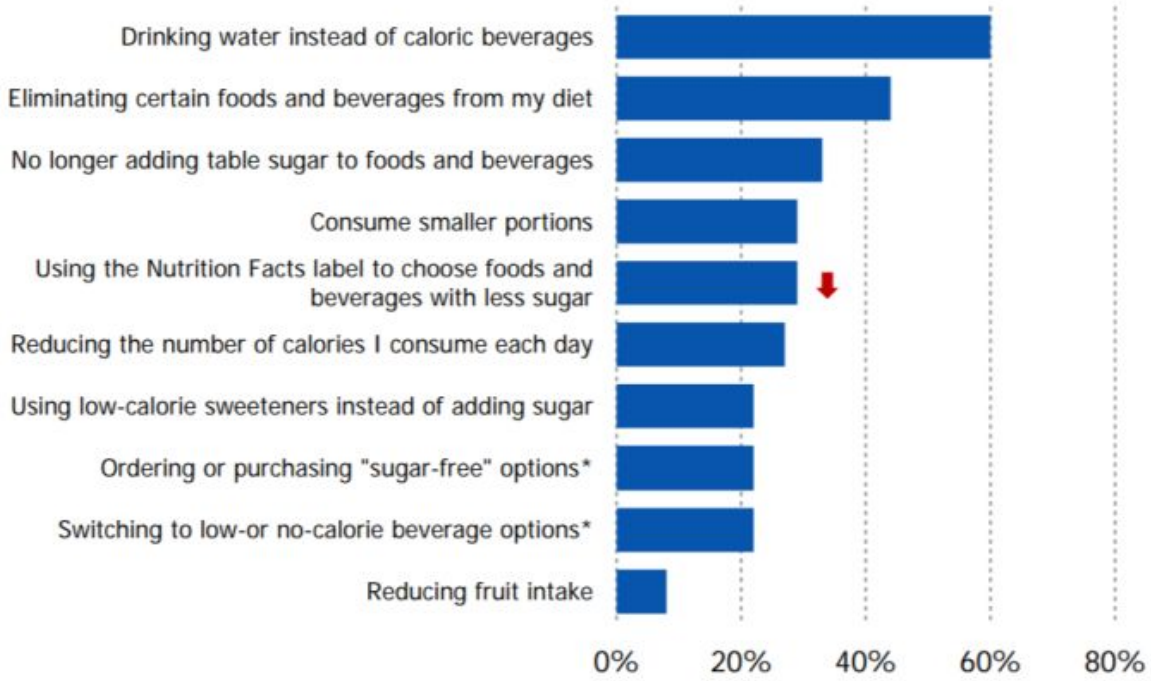
When asked to compare two products with an identical Nutrition Facts panel but different claims on pack, those with Non-GMO claims, shorter ingredients lists, a less sweet taste, or ‘green’ credentials were perceived to be healthier.

\*The IFIC Food & Health survey is an online survey of 1,009 Americans aged 18 to 80 conducted by Greenwald & Associates, using ResearchNow’s consumer panel, on March 12 to March 26, 2018.

Download the full 2018 IFIC food & health survey [HERE](#).

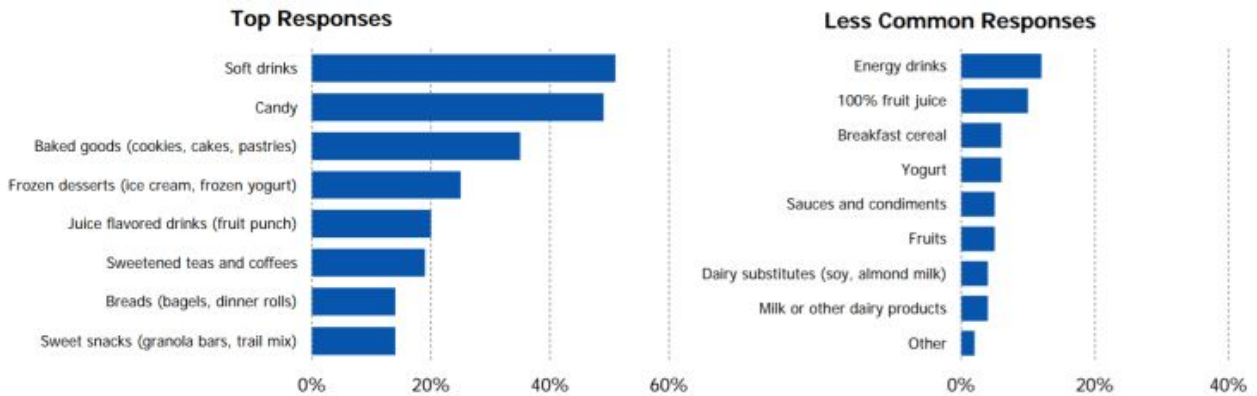
# Actions Taken to Limit/Avoid Sugars

(Of those limiting/avoiding sugars)



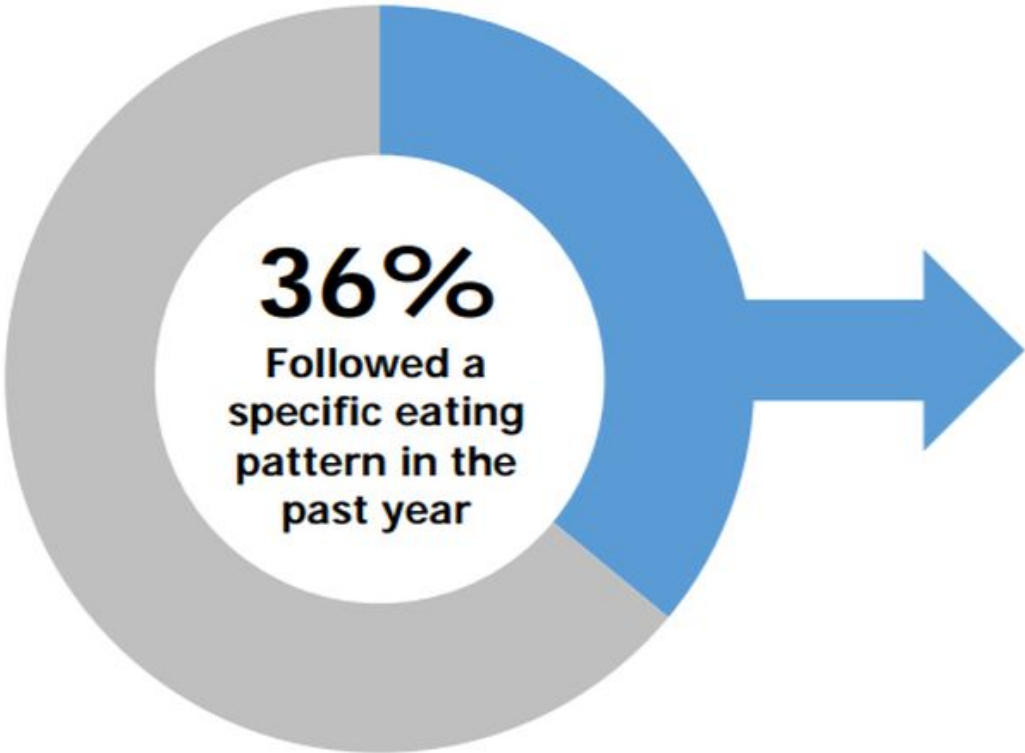
## Types of Foods and Beverages Eliminated to Reduce Sugar Consumption

(Of those eliminating foods and beverages to limit/avoid sugar)

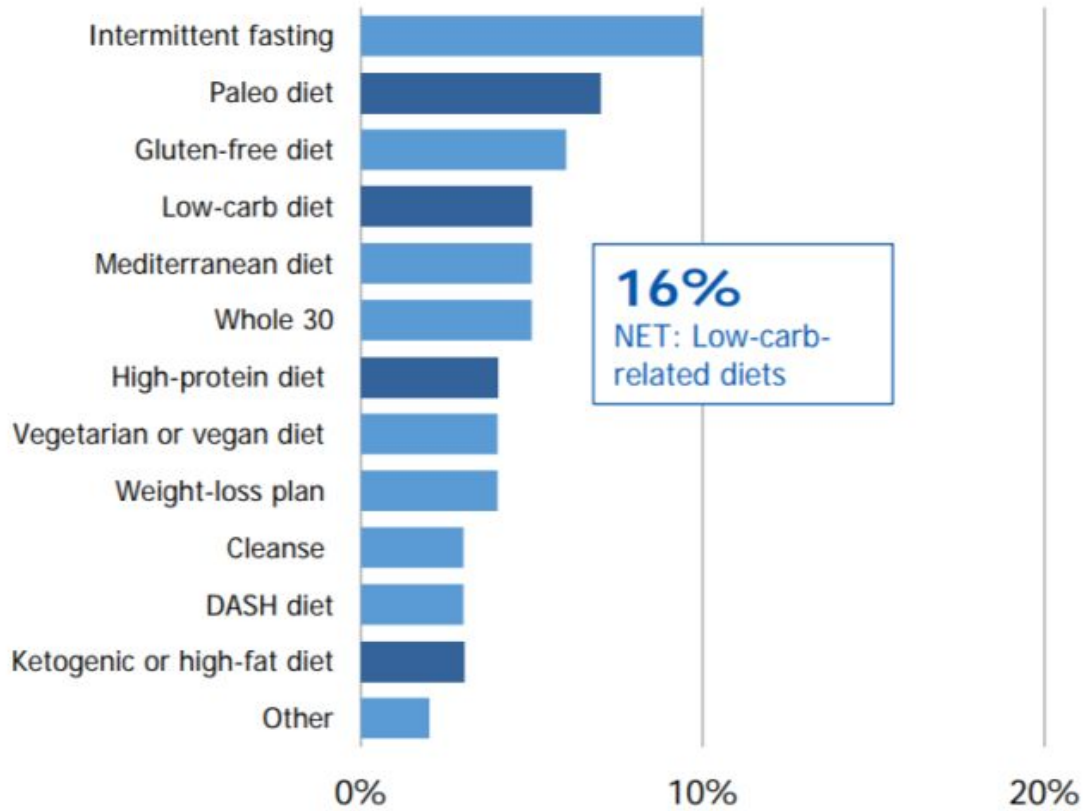


Q26: Which types of foods or beverages do you most often eliminate to reduce the amount of sugars you consume? (Select up to three.) (Of those eliminating foods and beverages to limit/avoid sugar, n=283)

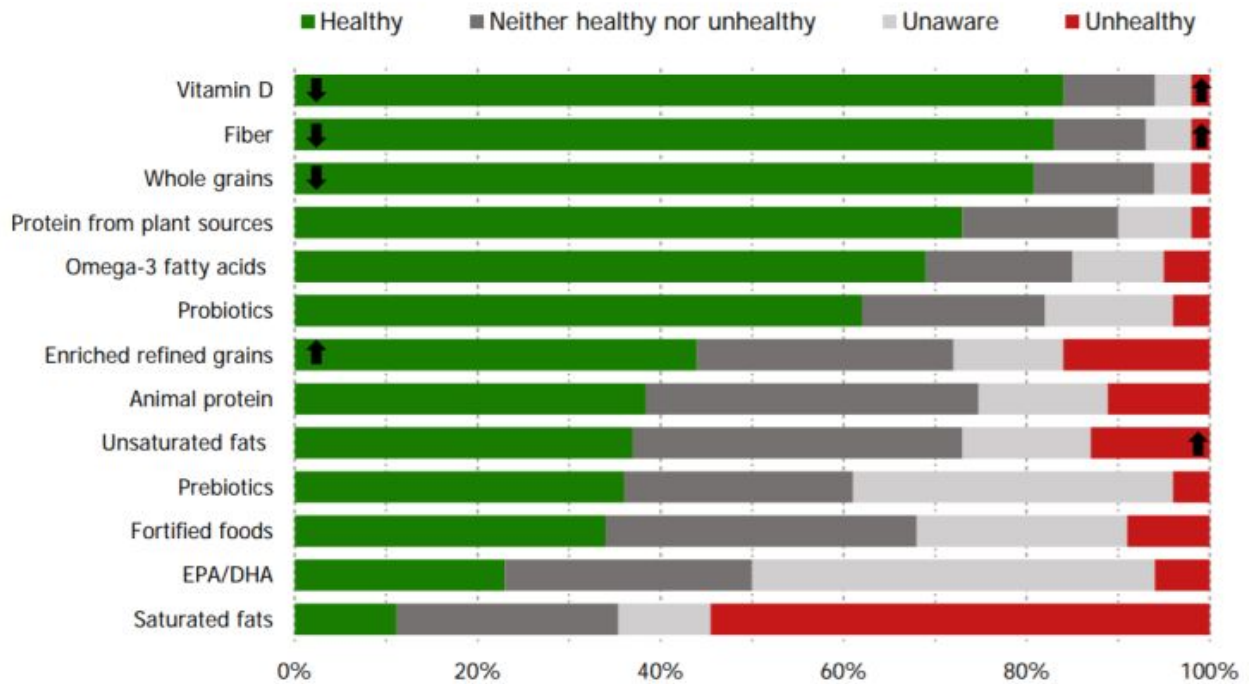
# Following Specific Eating Pattern



# Type of Eating Pattern Followed

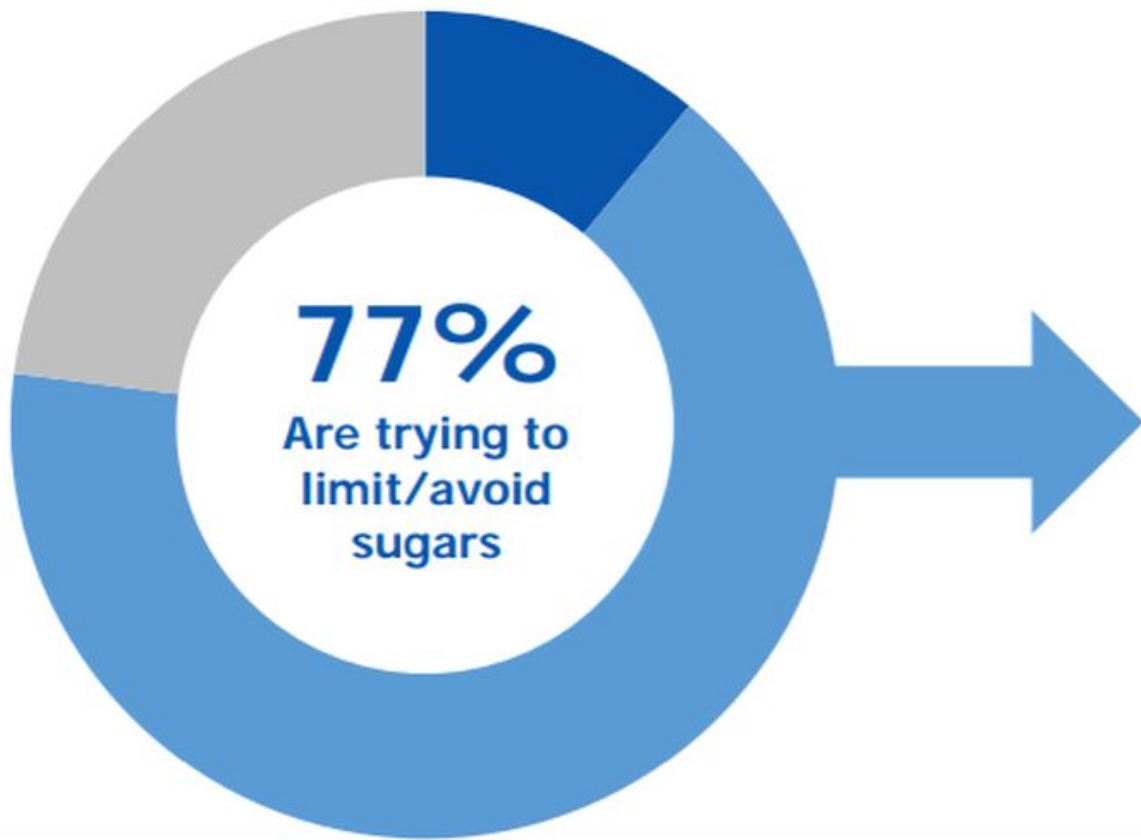


# Perceived Healthfulness



Q30: How would you rate the healthfulness of each of the following? (n=1,009)

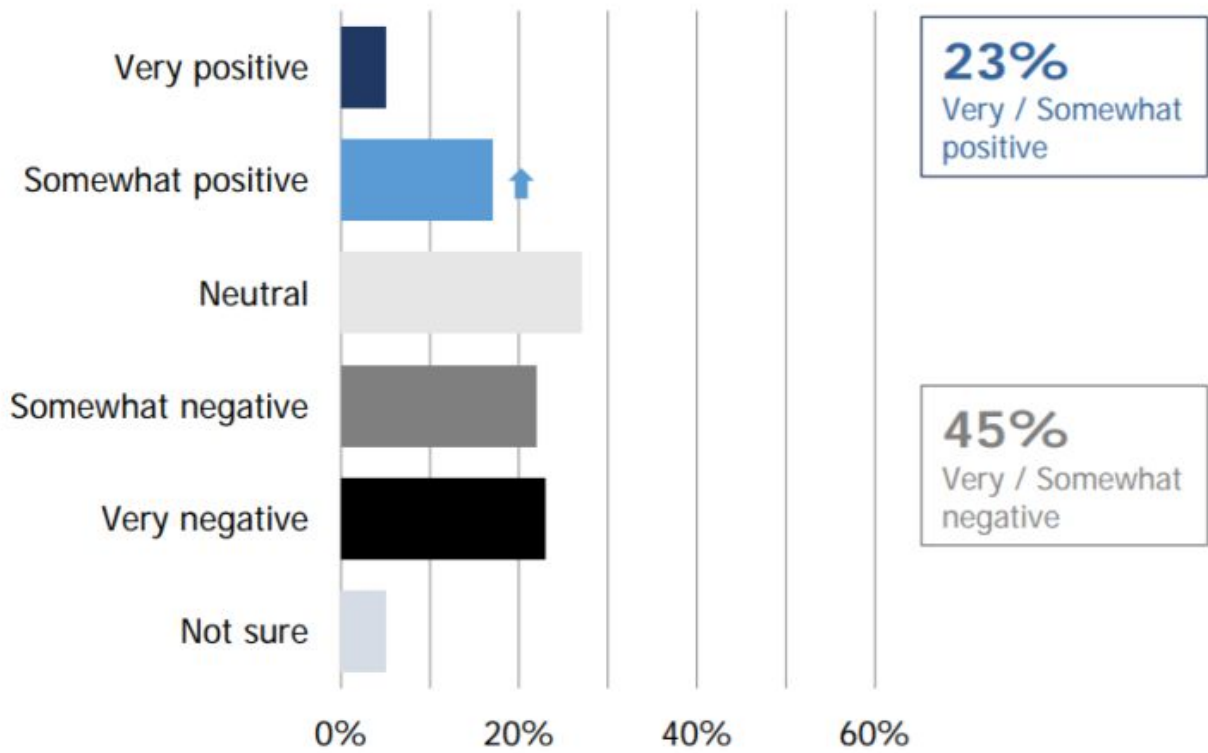
# Limiting/Avoiding Sugars in Diet



■ Avoid    ■ Limit



# Opinion of Low/No-Calorie Sweeteners



Q41: What is your opinion of low/no-calorie sweeteners? (ex. Sucralose, Aspartame, stevia leaf extract) (n=1,009)