

FY2 Wave 3-4 NI: Chapter 8 Healthy eating

The FSA is responsible for some areas of [nutrition policy in Northern Ireland](#) along with the [Department of Health](#). The FSA provides information to consumers in Northern Ireland on how to achieve a healthier diet and supports food businesses to provide and promote healthier food and drink. The [Eatwell Guide \(footnote 1\)](#) provides information to consumers on how they can get a balanced, healthier and more sustainable diet. The Eatwell Guide does this by providing a summary of the five main food groups, the proportions of different types of food consumers are recommended to eat, and information on fluid intake.

How healthy respondents think their diet is

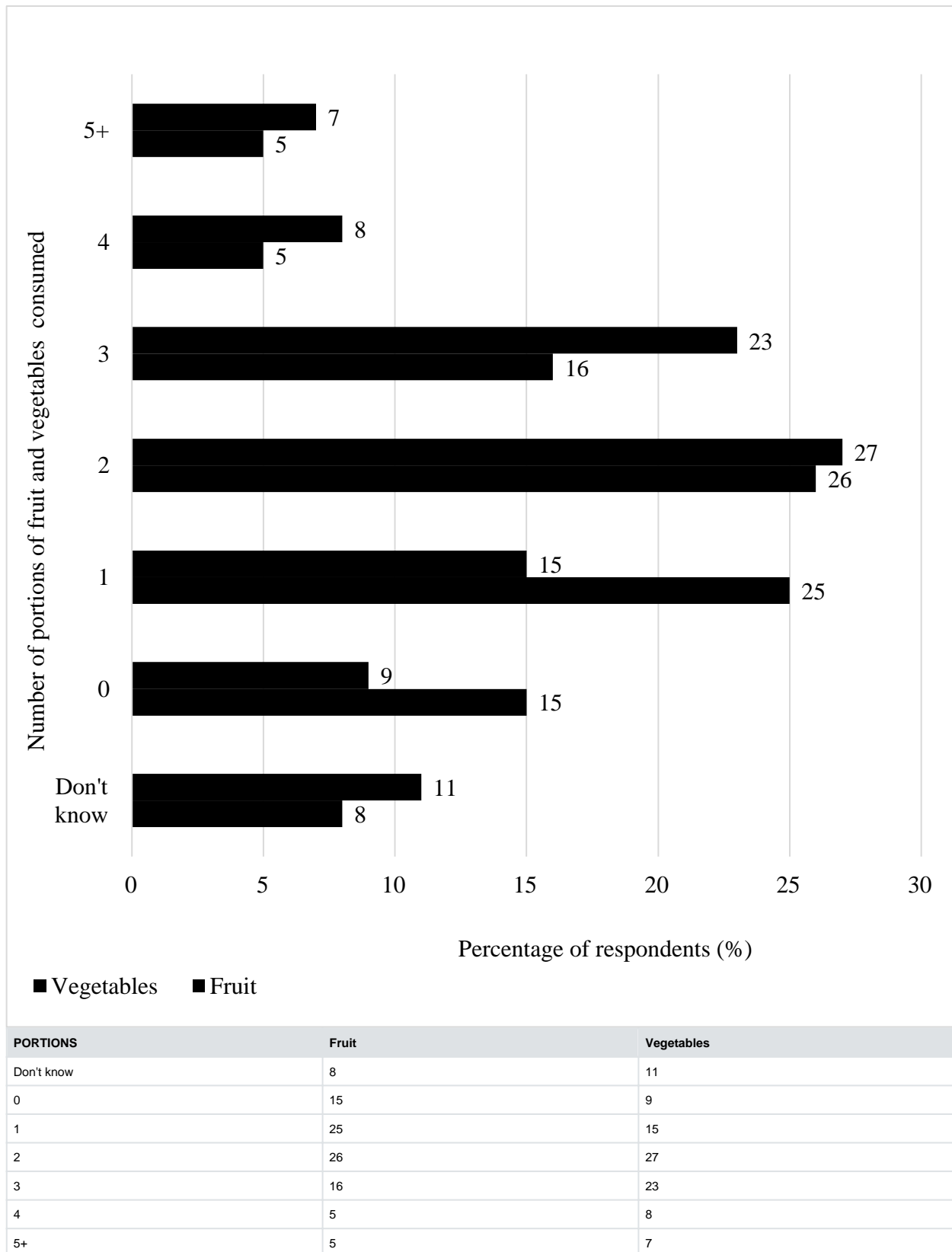
When asked how healthy they thought their usual diet was, most respondents reported that what they usually eat is fairly healthy (67%), with a further 20% reporting that what they eat is neither healthy or unhealthy. A minority reported that their diet was very healthy (8%), fairly unhealthy (5%), or very unhealthy (1%) [\(footnote 2\)](#)

What types of foods do respondents eat?

Figure 21 Number of portions of fruit and vegetables consumed during the previous day.

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Source: Food and You 2: Wave 3

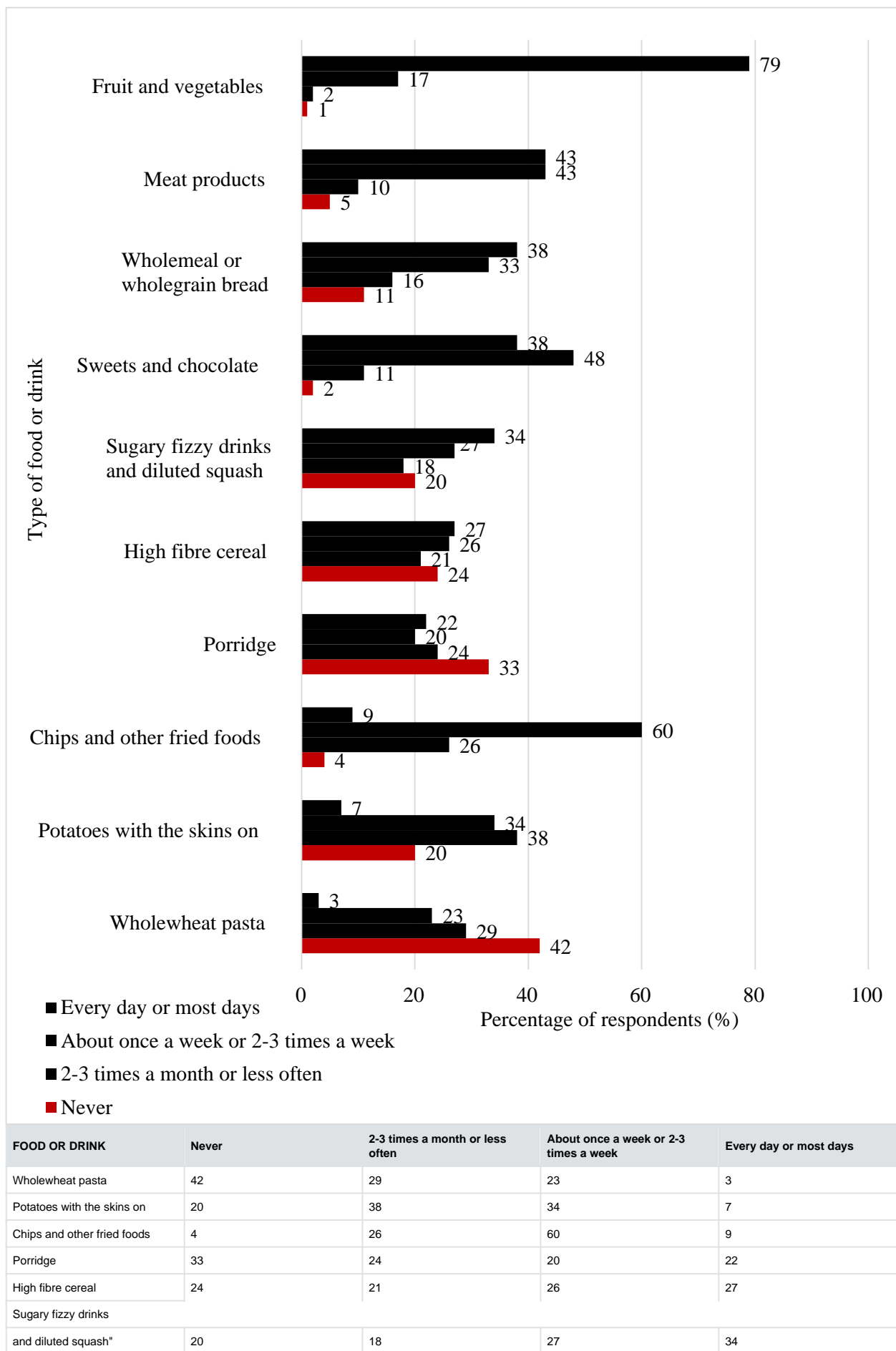
Respondents were asked how many portions of vegetables and fruit, not including fruit juice or

smoothies, they had eaten or drunk the previous day. The majority of respondents had eaten either one (25%) or two (26%) portions of fruit the previous day, whilst 15% of respondents had not eaten any. Approximately a quarter of respondents had eaten two (27%) or three (23%) portions of vegetables, whereas 9% respondents had not eaten any portions of vegetables the previous day. Around 1 in 10 respondents reported that they did not know how many portions of fruit (8%) and vegetables (8%) they had eaten (Figure 21) [\(footnote 3\)](#). In addition, respondents were asked if they had drunk some fruit juice or smoothie the previous day, around a third (34%) of respondents had drunk at least a small sized glass of fruit juice or smoothie [\(footnote 4\)](#).

Figure 22 How often respondents consumed certain types of food and drink.

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FOOD OR DRINK	Never	2-3 times a month or less often	About once a week or 2-3 times a week	Every day or most days
Sweets and chocolate	2	11	48	38
Wholemeal or wholegrain bread"	11	16	33	38
Meat products	5	10	43	43
Fruit and vegetables	1	2	17	79

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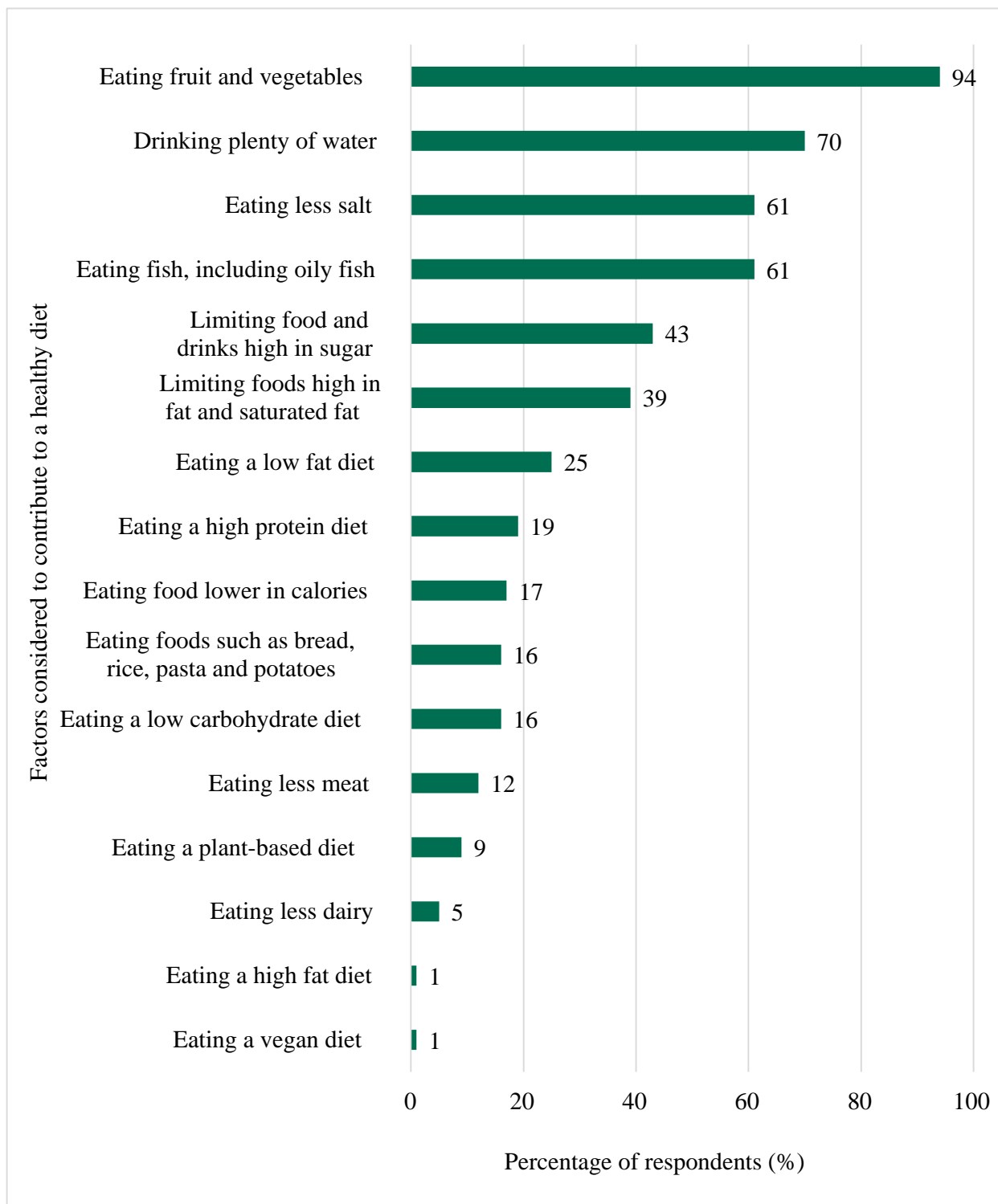
Respondents were asked how often they consumed certain types of food or drink. Most respondents (79%) reported that they ate fruit and vegetables every day or most days. Around 4 in 10 respondents reported that they ate meat products (43%), wholemeal or wholegrain bread (38%) or sweets and chocolate (38%) every day or most days. Of the listed foods, respondents were least like to report eating wholewheat pasta (42%) and porridge (33%) (Figure 22) [\(footnote 5\)](#).

Perceptions of what contributes to a healthy diet

Figure 23 Factors which respondents considered as most important for a healthy diet.

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Contributing factors	Percentage of respondents	
Eating a vegan diet	1	
Eating a high fat diet	1	
Eating less dairy	5	
Eating a plant-based diet	9	
Eating less meat	12	
Eating a low carbohydrate diet	16	
Eating foods such as bread, rice	pasta and potatoes"	16
Eating food lower in calories	17	

Contributing factors	Percentage of respondents
Eating a high protein diet	19
Eating a low fat diet	25
Limiting foods high in fat and saturated fat"	39
Limiting food and drinks high in sugar"	43
Eating fish, including oily fish	61
Eating less salt	61
Drinking plenty of water	70
Eating fruit and vegetables	94

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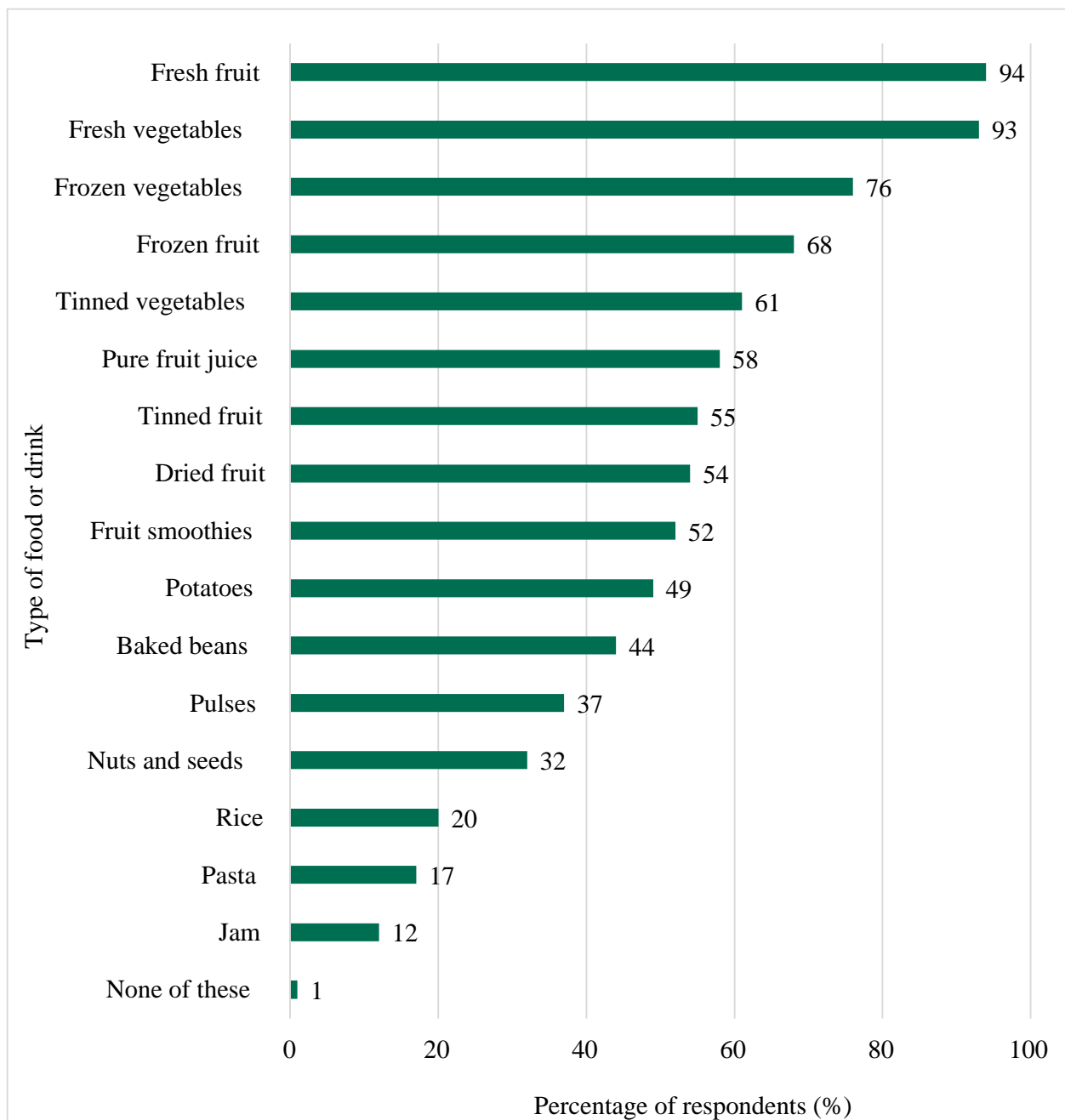
Source: Food and You 2: Wave 3

Respondents were asked what factors, from a given list, are the most important for people to do to have a healthy diet. Eating fruit and vegetables (94%), drinking plenty of water (70%), eating less salt (61%) and eating fish (61%) were considered the most important factors for people to have a healthy diet. Eating a vegan diet (1%), high fat diet (1%) and eating less dairy (5%) were considered the least important factors for people to have a healthy diet (Figure 23) [\(footnote 6\)](#).

Figure 24 Types of food or drink thought to count towards daily fruit and vegetable intake.

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Type of food or drink	Percentage of respondents
None of these	1
Jam	12
Pasta	17
Rice	20
Nuts and seeds	32
Pulses	37
Baked beans	44
Potatoes	49
Fruit smoothies	52
Dried fruit	54
Tinned fruit	55
Pure fruit juice	58
Tinned vegetables	61

Type of food or drink	Percentage of respondents
Frozen fruit	68
Frozen vegetables	76
Fresh vegetables	93
Fresh fruit	94

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Source: Food and You 2: Wave 3

Respondents were asked which types of food or drink, from a given list, can count toward someone's daily fruit and vegetable intake. In line with advice, most respondents reported that fresh fruit (94%), fresh vegetables (93%), frozen vegetables (76%), and frozen fruit (68%) count towards someone's daily fruit and vegetable intake. Many respondents reported that tinned vegetables (61%), pure fruit juice (58%), tinned fruit (55%), dried fruit (54%), fruit smoothies (52%), baked beans (44%) and pulses (37%) count towards someone's daily fruit and vegetable intake. However, some respondents reported some types of food can count towards someone's daily fruit and vegetable intake which do not, such as, potatoes (49%), nuts and seeds (32%), rice (20%), pasta (17%) and jam (12%) (Figure 24) ([footnote 7](#)).

Knowledge of UK Government recommendations

Proportions of different types of foods

The [UK Government recommends](#) that potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates, and fruit and vegetables should make up the largest parts of a diet. It is recommended that foods high in fat, sugar and salt, and oils and spreads should make up the smallest parts of a diet.

Respondents were asked which two food groups they thought the UK Government recommends should make up the largest part and smallest part of a diet. Most respondents reported that fruit and vegetables (85%) or meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and other proteins (72%) should make up the largest part of a diet. However, fewer respondents (17%) identified both food groups correctly ([footnote 8](#)). Most respondents reported that foods high in fat, sugar and salt (84%) or oils and spreads (55%) should make up the smallest part of a diet. However, fewer respondents (3%) identified both food groups correctly ([footnote 9](#)).

Fruit and vegetables

The [UK Government recommends](#) that people should eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day.

Respondents were asked how many portions of fruit and vegetables they thought the UK Government recommend that people should eat every day. Most respondents (80%) reported that the UK Government recommend that people should eat 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day and 5% of respondents reported 6 portions, however 13% of respondents reported that people should eat between 1 and 4 portions ([footnote 10](#)).

Calories

The [UK Government recommends](#) that most adult females require on average 2000 calories a day and that most adult males require on average 2500 calories a day.

Respondents were asked how many calories they thought the UK Government recommend that an average adult female and average adult male should eat every day. In line with recommendations, 45% of respondents reported that an adult female should eat 2000 calories every day. However, 1% reported that an adult female should eat 500 calories a day, 6% reported 1000 calories a day, 35% reported 1500 calories a day, 3% reported 2500 calories a day, and 10% reported that they did not know [\(footnote 11\)](#). In line with UK Government recommendations, 48% of respondents reported that an adult male should eat 2500 calories. However, 1% reported that an adult male should eat 500 calories a day, 1% reported 1000 calories a day, 29% reported 2000 calories, 6% reported 3000 calories a day and 10% reported that they did not know [\(footnote 12\)](#).

Salt

The [UK government recommends](#) that adults should have no more than 6 grams of salt per day. Respondents were asked how much salt they thought the UK Government recommend that an adult should not exceed each day. In line with recommendations, 16% of respondents reported that adults should not exceed 6 grams of salt a day. However, 35% of respondents reported that adults should not exceed 2 grams of salt a day, 24% of respondents reported that adults should not exceed 4 grams of salt a day, 1% of respondents reported that adults should not exceed 8 grams of salt a day, and 24% of respondents reported that they did not know [\(footnote 13\)](#).

Fibre

The UK Government recommend that an adult should eat 30 grams of fibre each day.

Respondents were asked how much fibre they thought the UK Government recommend that an adult should eat each day. In line with recommendations, 29% of respondents reported that adults should eat 30 grams of fibre each day. However, 36% reported other levels of fibre, and 35% of respondents reported that they did not know [\(footnote 14\)](#).

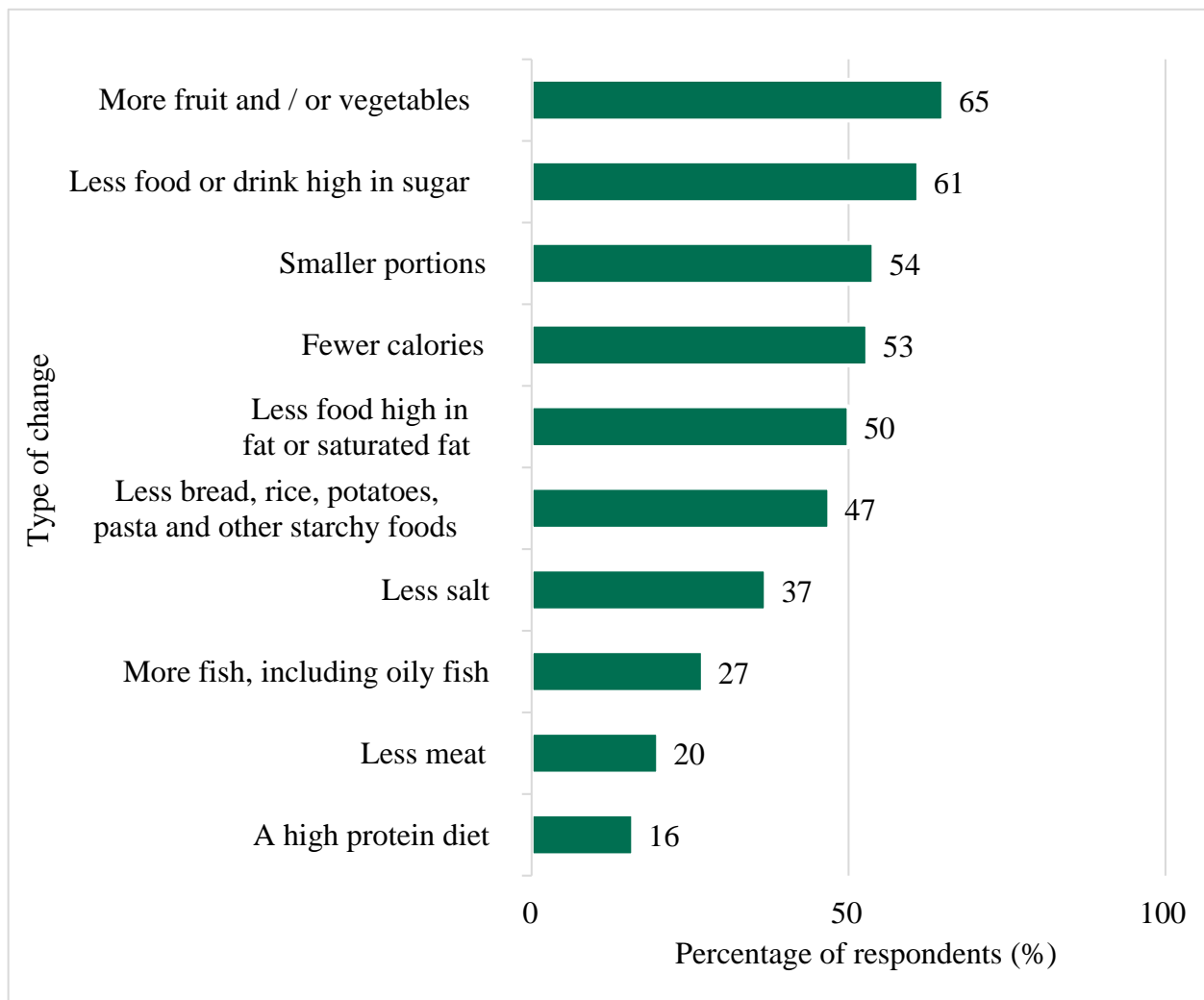
Changes in eating habits

Respondents were asked if they had made (or attempted to make) any changes to what they ate or drank in the previous 12 months. Over half (57%) of respondents reported that they had done this [\(footnote 15\)](#).

Figure 25 Ten most common changes or attempted changes to what respondents ate or drank in the previous 12 months.

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Changes	Percentage of respondents
A high protein diet	16
Less meat	20
More fish, including oily fish	27
Less salt	37
Less bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods	47
Less food high in fat or saturated fat "	50
Fewer calories	53
Smaller portions	54
Less food or drink high in sugar	61
More fruit and / or vegetables	65

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Source: Food and You 2: Wave 3

Respondents who had made or attempted to make any changes, from a given list, to what they ate or drank in the previous 12 months, were asked what changes they had made or attempted to make. The most common changes respondents reported were consuming: more fruit and / or vegetables (65%); less food or drink high in sugar (61%); smaller portions (54%); and fewer

calories (53%) (Figure 25) [\(footnote 16\)](#).

Respondents who had made or attempted to make any changes to what they ate or drank in the previous 12 months were asked why they had made or attempted to make these changes. The most common reasons given were to be more healthy or to have a healthier lifestyle (83%) and to lose weight (75%) [\(footnote 17\)](#).

Eating healthy outside the home

Respondents were asked how healthy they thought that the food they eat out or take out is compared to the food they eat at home. The majority (84%) of respondents thought that the food they eat outside the home is less healthy (i.e. a bit less healthy or a lot less healthy). Only 3% stated that the food they eat out or take out is healthier than the food they eat at home [\(footnote 18\)](#).

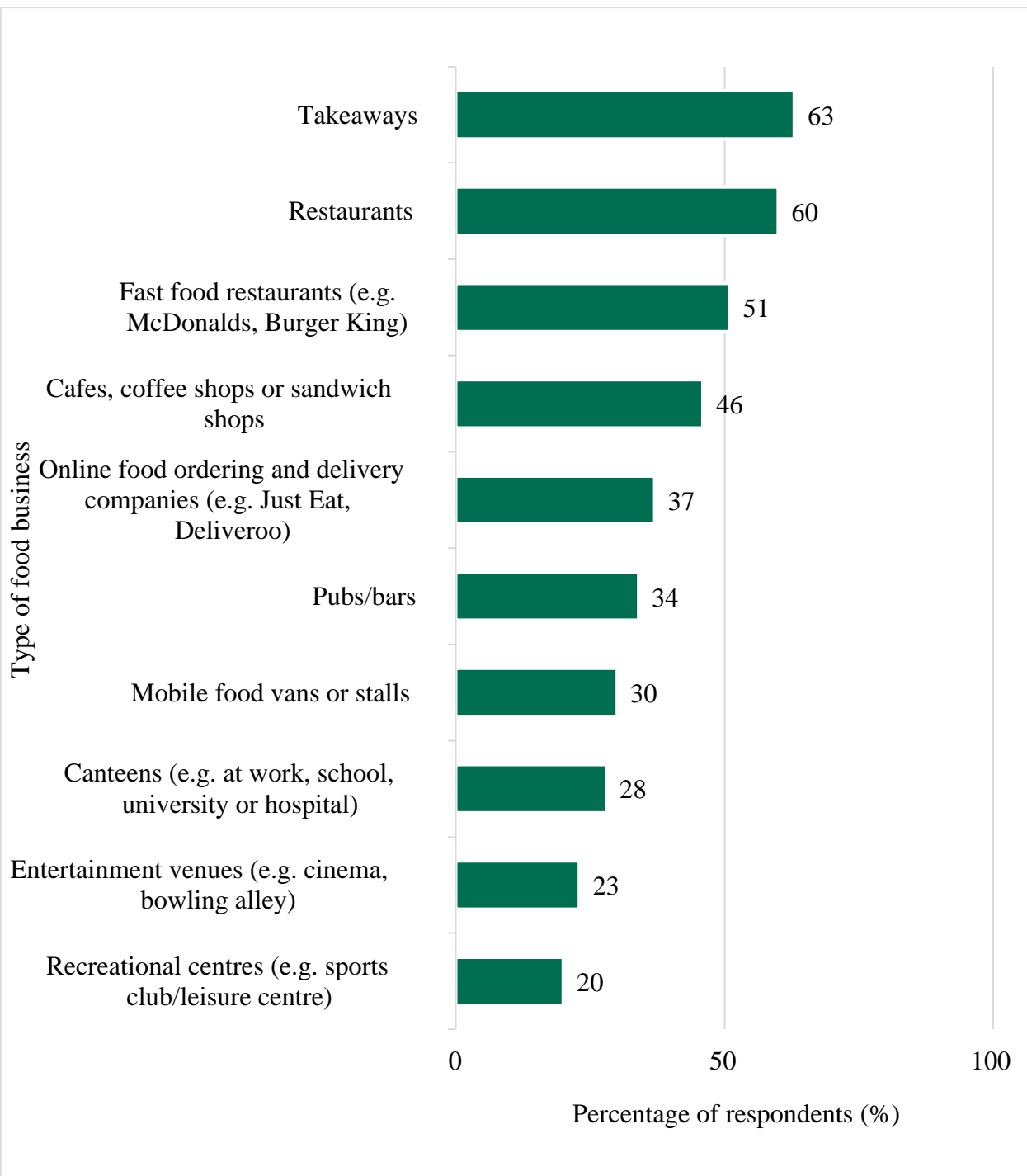
The prevalence of respondents reporting that the food they eat out or take out is less healthy compared to the food they eat at home varied in the following ways:

- Gender: Women (89%) were more likely to report that the food they eat out or take out is less healthy than the food they eat at home compared to men (79%).
- Annual household income: Respondents with a household income of £32,000-£63,999 (90%) were more likely to report that the food they eat out or take out is less healthy than the food they eat at home compared to respondents with an income below £19,000 (77%).
- NS-SEC: respondents in managerial, administrative and professional occupations (87%) and intermediate occupations (87%) were more likely to report that the food they eat out or take out is less healthy than the food they eat at home compared to those in semi-routine and routine occupations (74%).
- Responsibility for cooking: respondents who were responsible for cooking (85%) were more likely to report that the food they eat out or take out is less healthy than the food they eat at home compared to those who do not cook (75%).
- NIMDM: respondents who lived in the least deprived areas (NIMDM 5) (89%) were more likely to report that the food they eat out or take out is less healthy than the food they eat at home compared to respondents who lived in the most deprived areas (NIMDM 1) (78%).

Figure 26 Where respondents would like to see more information about how healthy different food and drink options are.

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Business Type	Percentage of respondents
Recreational centres (e.g. sports club/leisure centre)	20
Entertainment venues (e.g. cinema, bowling alley)	23
Canteens (e.g. at work, school, university or hospital)	28
Mobile food vans or stalls	30
Pubs/bars	34
Online food ordering and delivery companies (e.g. Just Eat, Deliveroo)	37
Cafes, coffee shops or sandwich shops	46
Fast food restaurants (e.g. McDonalds, Burger King)	51
Restaurants	60
Takeaways	63

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Respondents were asked to select from a given list in which places they would like to see more information displayed about how healthy different food and drink options are. Most commonly, respondents reported that they would like takeaways (63%) and restaurants (60%) to display more information about how healthy different options are. Around half (51%) reported that they would like fast food restaurants (e.g. McDonalds, Burger King) to display this information ([footnote 19](#)).

Respondents were asked what nutritional information they would find useful on the menu to help inform their choices when eating out. Over half (55%) of respondents reported that they would find it useful if menus showed calorie information, 49% of respondents reported information about fat content would be useful, 46% reported information about sugar content would be useful and 43% reported information about salt content would be useful. Only 16% reported that none of these would be useful.

1. The Eatwell Guide was developed with Public Health England (PHE) in association with FSA Northern Ireland, the Welsh Government and Food Standards Scotland. PHE has been replaced by UK Health Security Agency and Office for Health Improvement and Disparities.
2. Question: Overall, would you say that what you usually eat is? Responses: very healthy, fairly healthy, neither healthy or unhealthy, fairly unhealthy, very unhealthy. Base is 1079, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
3. Question: Thinking about what you ate and drank yesterday. How many portions of...A Fruit B Vegetables...did you eat yesterday? Response: open text. Base is 1079, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
4. Question: Did you drink a small sized glass of fruit juice or smoothie yesterday? Response: Yes - a small glass (150ml/5 fluid ounces), Yes - a larger glass (more than 150ml/5 fluid ounces), No - I did not drink any fruit juice yesterday, No - drank less than a small glass (150ml/5 fluid ounces), Don't know. Base is 1079, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
5. Question: How often do you eat? Response: A Eat meat products (e.g. sausages, burgers, meat and chicken pies), Eat sweets and chocolate, Drink sugary fizzy drinks and diluted squash, Eat chips and other fried foods, Eat fruit and vegetables. B Porridge, High fibre cereal (e.g. wheat biscuits, bran flakes, shredded wheat), Wholemeal or wholegrain bread, Wholewheat pasta, Potatoes with the skins on. Base A is 1626, all respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3. B is 1079, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
6. Question: Which of the following are the most important for people to do to have a healthy diet? Responses: Eating fruit and vegetables, Drinking plenty of water, Eating fish, including oily fish, Eating less salt, Limiting food and drinks high in sugar, Limiting foods high in fat and saturated fat, Eating a low fat diet, Eating a high protein diet, Eating food lower in calories, Eating foods such as bread, rice, pasta and potatoes, Eating a low

carbohydrate diet, Eating less meat, Eating a plant-based diet (eating majority of foods from plant sources), Eating less dairy, Eating a high fat diet, Eating a vegan diet (not eating any animal products). Base is 1079, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.

7. Question: Which of the following, if any, can count towards someone's daily fruit and vegetable intake? Responses: Fresh fruit, Fresh vegetables, Frozen vegetables, Frozen fruit, Tinned vegetables for example sweetcorn, Pure fruit juice, Tinned fruit for example peaches, Dried fruit for example raisins or apricots, Fruit smoothies, Potatoes, Baked beans, Pulses, such as lentils, chickpeas or kidney beans, Nuts and seeds, Rice, Pasta, Jam, None of these. Base is 1626, all respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
8. Question: Which two of the following food groups do you think the UK Government recommends should make up the largest part of our diet? Respondents: fruit and vegetables; meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and other proteins; Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates; Dairy (cheese, milk, yoghurt) and alternatives; Foods high in fat, sugar and salt; Oils and spreads; Don't know. Base is 1053, all online respondents in Northern Ireland except those who 'don't know' which food groups the UK Government recommends make up the largest part of our diet. Wave 3.
9. Question: Which two of the following food groups do you think the UK Government recommends should make up the largest part of our diet? Respondents: fruit and vegetables; meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and other proteins; Potatoes, bread, rice, pasta and other starchy carbohydrates; Dairy (cheese, milk, yoghurt) and alternatives; Foods high in fat, sugar and salt; Oils and spreads; Don't know. Base is 1626, all respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
10. Question: How many portions of fruit and vegetables do you think the UK Government and health experts recommend that people should eat every day? Responses: 1 portion, 2 portions, 3 portions, 4 portions, 5 portions, 6 portions, Don't know. Base is 1079, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
11. Question: How many calories do you think the UK Government and health experts recommend that an adult female should eat each day? Responses: 500 calories, 1000 calories, 1500 calories, 2000 calories, 2500 calories, 3000 calories. Don't know. Base is 1079, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
12. Question: How many calories do you think the UK Government and health experts recommend that an adult male should eat each day? Responses: 500 calories, 1000 calories, 1500 calories, 2000 calories, 2500 calories, Don't know. Base is 1079, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
13. Question: How much salt - in grams or ounces - do you think the UK Government and health experts recommend that an adult should not exceed each day? Responses: 2 grams or 0.07 of an ounce, 4 grams or 0.14 of an ounce, 6 grams or 0.21 of an ounce, 8 grams or 0.28 of an ounce, Don't know. Base is 1079, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.
14. Question: How much fibre - in grams or ounces - do you think the UK Government and health experts recommend that an adult should eat each day? Responses: 10 grams or

0.35 ounces, 20 grams or 0.70 ounces, 30 grams or 1.05 ounces, 40 grams or 1.41 ounces, Don't know. Base is 1079, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.

15. Questions: In the last 12 months, have you made, or attempted to make, any changes to what you eat or drink? Responses: Yes, No, Don't know. Base is 1626, all respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.

16. Questions: What changes have you made or attempted to make? Responses: More fruit and/or vegetables, Less food or drink high in sugar e.g. sweets, chocolate and fizzy drinks, Smaller portions, Fewer calories, Less food high in fat or saturated fat e.g. sausages, pastries, cheese and crisps, Less bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods, Less salt, More fish, including oily fish, Less meat, A high protein diet, A plant-based diet (eating majority of foods from plant sources), More bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods, A vegan diet (not eating any animal products), Larger portions, More calories, Other, None of these. Base is 888, all respondents in Northern Ireland who have made / attempted to make a change to their diet in the last 12 months. Wave 3.

17. Questions: Why have you made or attempted to make [this/these change/s] to what you eat or drink? Responses: To be more healthy or have a healthier lifestyle, To lose weight, To improve my mental health, Due to age or getting older, For a specific health condition, Due to concerns about the environment, Based on advice from medical professionals e.g. a doctor, nurse etc, Because of lockdown or concerns about coronavirus (COVID19), Based on UK Government healthy eating guidelines, Financial reasons (e.g. higher cost of food or reduced income), To gain weight, Due to a significant life event (e.g. getting married, getting divorced, or bereavement), Based on advice from celebrities or influencers, Other reason. Base is 888, all respondents in Northern Ireland who have made or attempted to make a change to their diet in the last 12 months.

18. Questions: When you eat out or buy food to take away, how healthy would you say the food that you eat is, compared to when you eat at home? Responses: A lot more healthy, A bit more healthy, About the same, A bit less healthy, A lot less healthy, Don't know. Base is 1079, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 3.

19. Questions: Why have you made or attempted to make [this/these change/s] to what you eat or drink? Responses: To be more healthy or have a healthier lifestyle, To lose weight, To improve my mental health, Due to age or getting older, For a specific health condition, Due to concerns about the environment, Based on advice from medical professionals e.g. a doctor, nurse etc, Because of lockdown or concerns about coronavirus (COVID-19), Based on UK Government healthy eating guidelines, Financial reasons (e.g. higher cost of food or reduced income), To gain weight, Due to a significant life event (e.g. getting married, getting divorced, or bereavement), Based on advice from celebrities or influencers, Other reason. Base is 888, all respondents in Northern Ireland who have made / attempted to make a change to their diet in the last 12 months.