

F&Y2 Wave 7-8 NI: Chapter 8: Healthy eating

Introduction

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 depicts the [UK Government recommendations](#) by giving a visual representation of the types of foods and drinks we should consume and in what proportions to have a healthy, balanced diet.

This chapter provides an overview of the types of foods respondents eat, perceptions of what contributes towards a healthy diet, respondents knowledge of UK Government recommendations and dietary changes respondents have made to their diet.

The findings in this chapter are from Wave 7.

How healthy respondents think their diet is

When asked how healthy they thought their usual diet was, over half of respondents reported that what they usually eat is fairly healthy (55%), with a further 27% reporting that what they eat is neither healthy nor unhealthy. A minority reported that their diet was very healthy (8%), fairly unhealthy (7%), or very unhealthy (1%). [\(footnote 2\)](#)

What types of foods do respondents eat?

Respondents were asked how many portions of vegetables and fruit, not including fruit juice or smoothies, they had eaten or drunk the previous day.

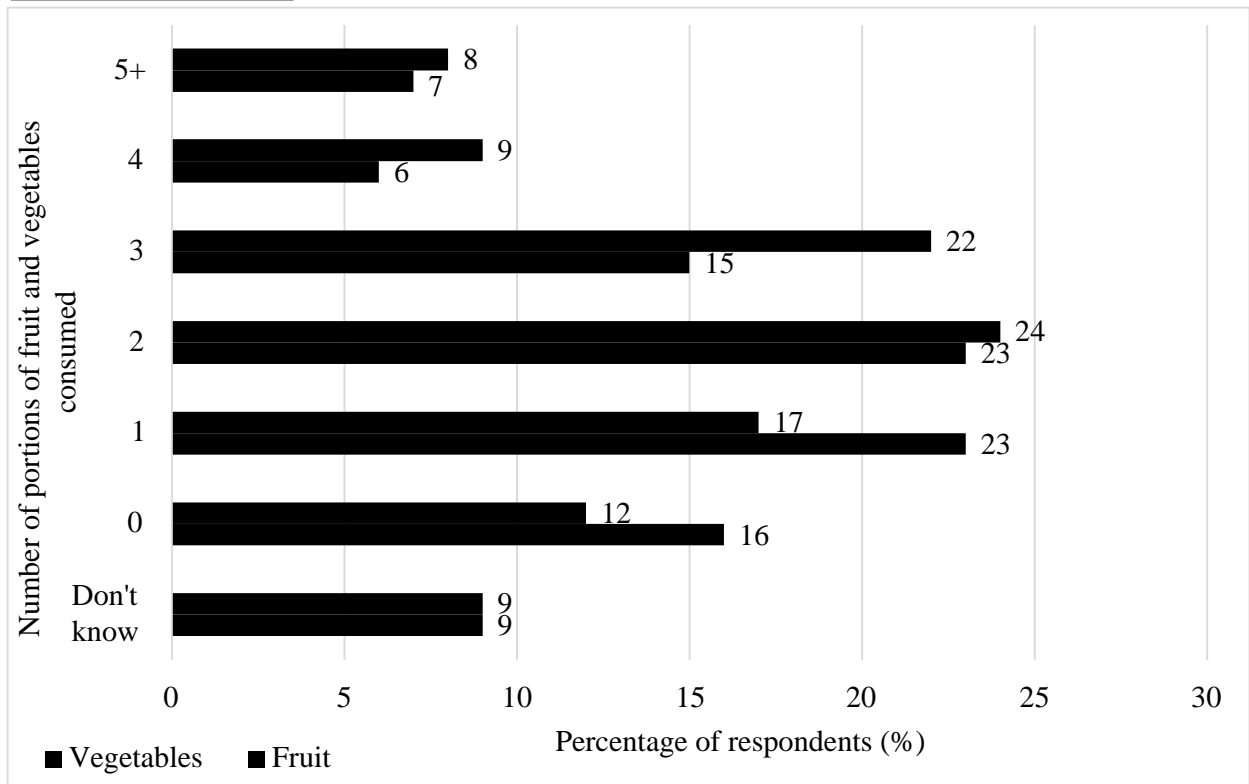
Around a quarter of respondents had eaten either one (23%) or two (23%) portions of fruit the previous day, whilst 16% had not eaten any. Approximately a quarter of respondents had eaten two (24%) or three (22%) portions of vegetables, whereas 12% respondents had not eaten any portions of vegetables the previous day. Around 1 in 10 respondents reported that they did not know how many portions of fruit (9%) and vegetables (9%) they had eaten (Figure 21). [\(footnote 3\)](#)

In addition, respondents were asked if they had drunk a glass of fruit juice or smoothie the previous day. Around 2 in 10 (22%) respondents had drunk a small sized glass of fruit juice or smoothie and 14% reported that they had drunk a large glass of fruit juice or smoothie. [\(footnote 4\)](#)

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

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Number	Fruit	Vegetables
Don't know	9	9
0	16	12
1	23	17
2	23	24
3	15	22
4	6	9
5+	7	8

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Source: Food and You 2: Wave 7

Respondents were asked how often they consumed certain types of food or drink. Most respondents (77%) reported that they ate fruit and vegetables every day or most days. However,

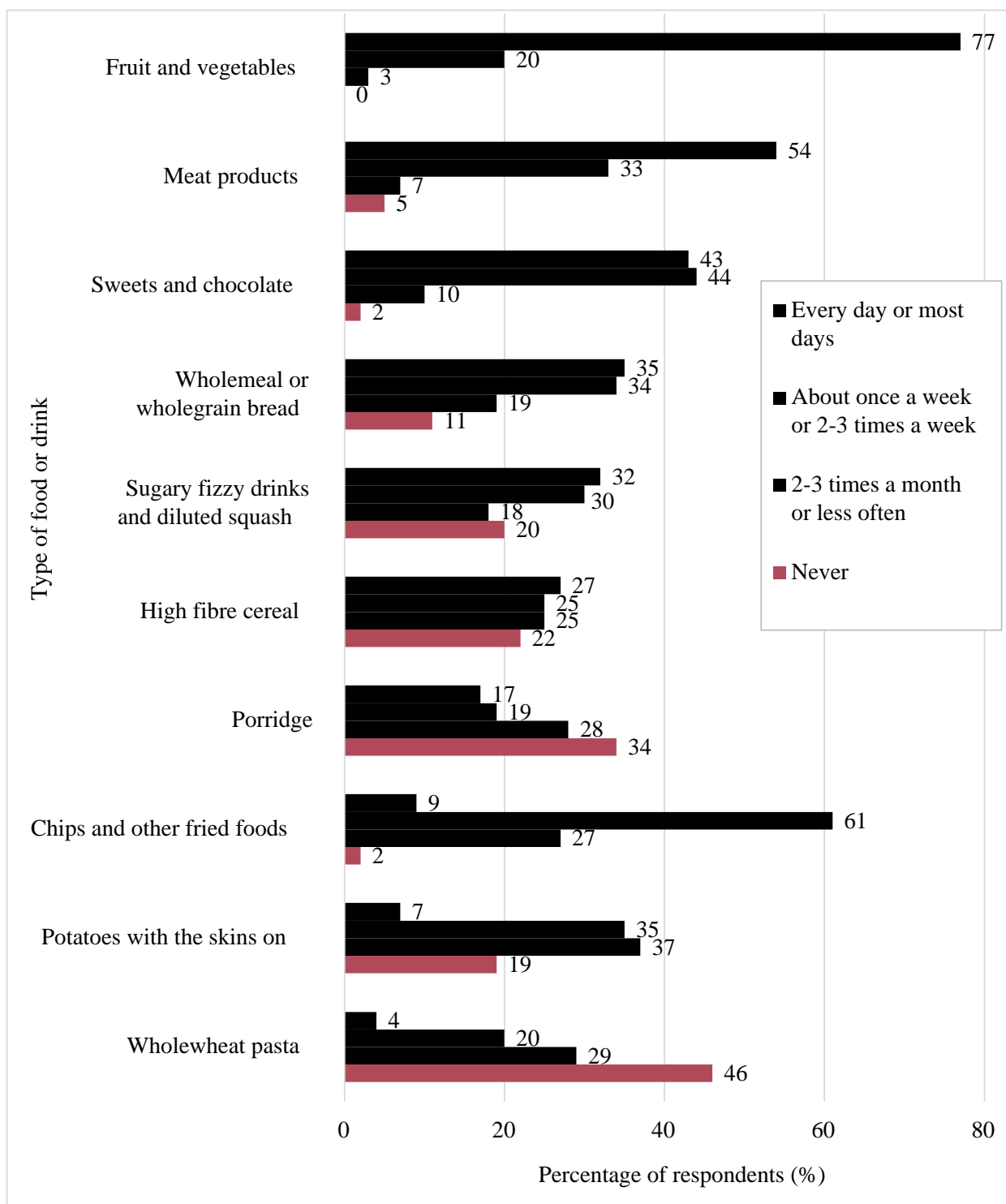
20% reported eating fruit and vegetables about once a week or 2 to 3 times a week, while 3% ate fruit and vegetables 2-3 times a month or less often.

Around half of respondents reported that they ate meat products (54%), sweets and chocolate (43%) and wholemeal or wholegrain bread (35%) every day or most days. Of the listed foods, respondents were least likely to report eating wholewheat pasta (46% reported “never”) and porridge (34% reported “never”) (Figure 22). [\(footnote 5\)](#)

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

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Type of 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
Wholewheat pasta	46	29	20	4
Potatoes with the skins on	19	37	35	7

Type of food or drink	Never	2-3 times a month or less often	About once a week or 2-3times a week	Every day or most days
Chips and other fried foods	2	27	61	9
Porridge	34	28	19	17
High fibre cereal	22	25	25	27
Sugary fizzy drinks and diluted squash	20	18	30	32
Wholemeal or wholegrain bread	11	19	34	35
Sweets and chocolate	2	10	44	43
Meat products	5	7	33	54
Fruit and vegetables	0	3	20	77

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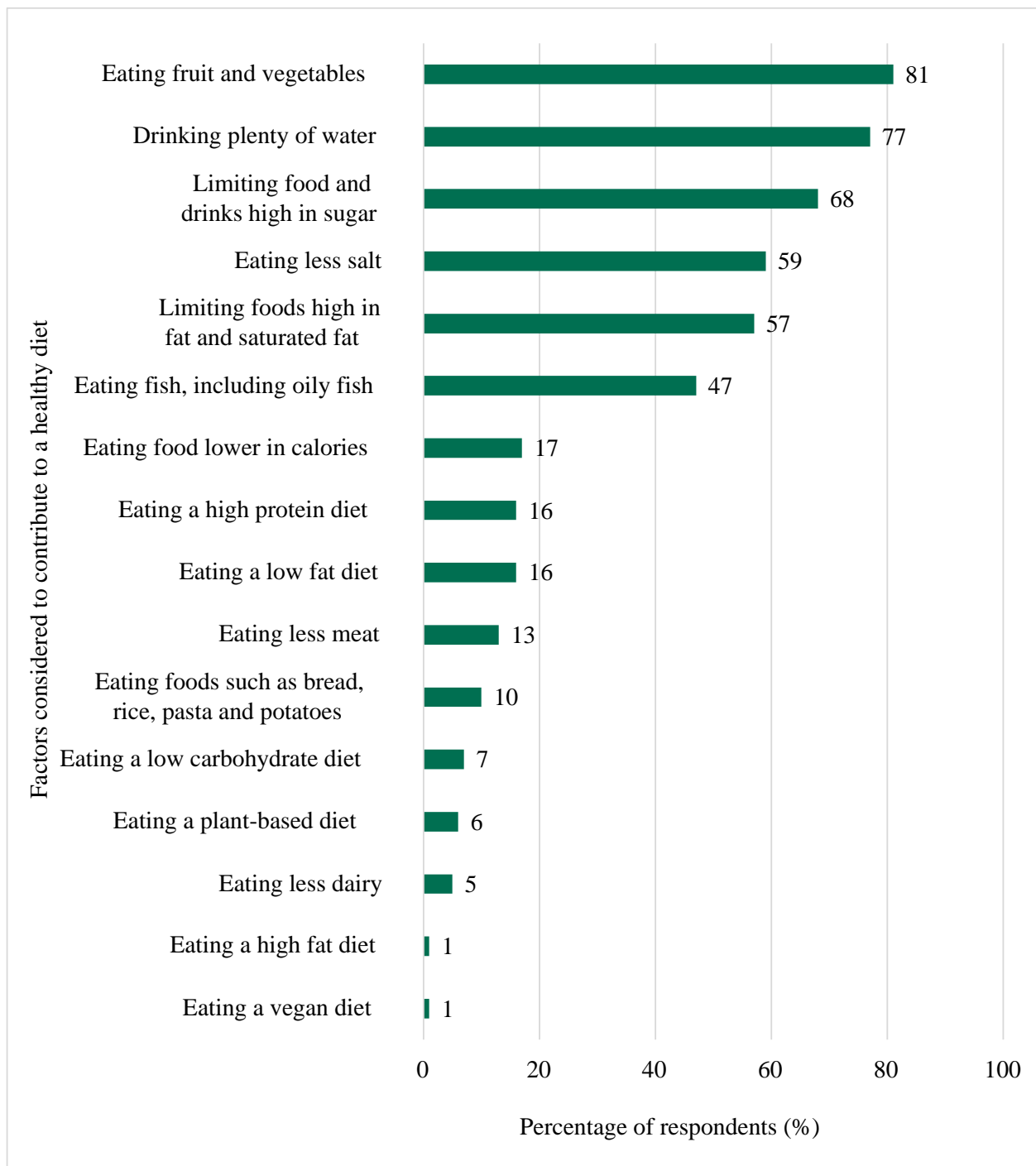
Perceptions of what contributes to a healthy diet

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 (81%), drinking plenty of water (77%), limiting food and drinks high in sugar (68%) and eating less salt (59%) 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 23. Factors which respondents considered as most important for a healthy diet.

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Factors	Percentage of respondents (%)
Eating a vegan diet	1
Eating a high fat diet	1
Eating less dairy	5
Eating a plant-based diet	6

Factors	Percentage of respondents (%)
Eating a low carbohydrate diet	7
Eating foods such as bread, rice, pasta and potatoes	10
Eating less meat	13
Eating a low fat diet	16
Eating a high protein diet	16
Eating food lower in calories	17
Eating fish, including oily fish	47
Limiting foods high in fat and saturated fat	57
Eating less salt	59
Limiting food and drinks high in sugar	68
Drinking plenty of water	77
Eating fruit and vegetables	81

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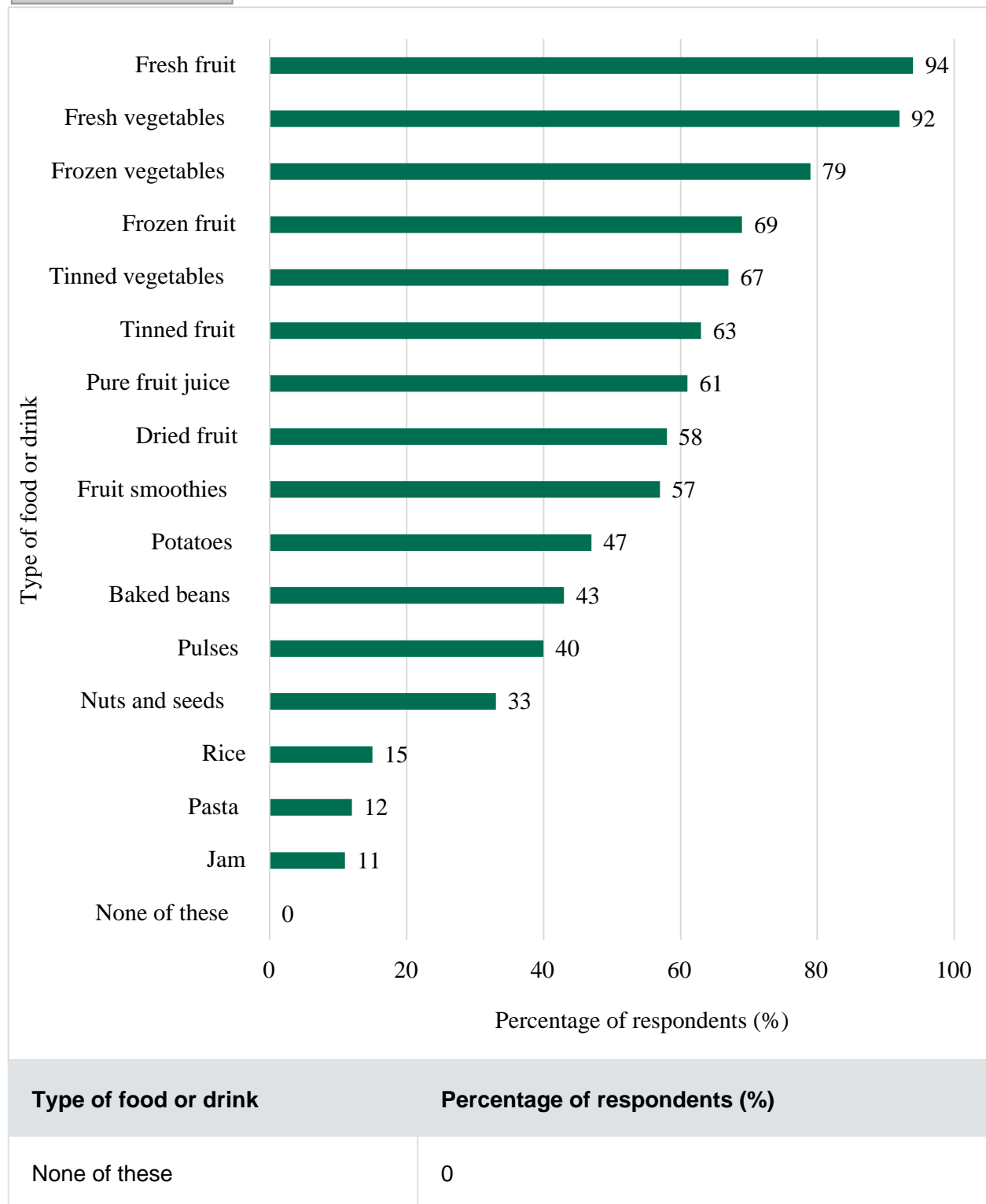
Source: Food and You 2: Wave 7

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 (92%), frozen vegetables (79%), and frozen fruit (69%) count towards someone's daily fruit and vegetable intake. Many respondents correctly reported that tinned vegetables (67%), pure fruit juice (61%), tinned fruit (63%), dried fruit (58%), fruit smoothies (57%), baked beans (43%) and pulses (40%) 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 (47%), nuts and seeds (33%), rice (15%), pasta (12%) and jam (11%) (Figure 24). [\(footnote 7\)](#)

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 (%)
Jam	11
Pasta	12
Rice	15
Nuts and seeds	33
Pulses	40
Baked beans	43
Potatoes	47
Fruit smoothies	57
Dried fruit	58
Pure fruit juice	61
Tinned fruit	63
Tinned vegetables	67
Frozen fruit	69
Frozen vegetables	79
Fresh vegetables	92
Fresh fruit	94

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Source: Food and You 2: Wave 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 (83%) or meat, fish, eggs, beans, pulses and other proteins (70%) should make up the largest part of a diet. However, only 20% identified both food groups correctly. [\(footnote 8\)](#) Most respondents reported that foods high in fat, sugar and salt (86%) or oils and spreads (61%) should make up the smallest part of a diet, however only 3% of respondents identified both 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 and health experts recommend that people should eat every day. Most respondents (74%) reported that the UK Government recommend that people should eat at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables every day, while a minority (4%) of respondents reported at least 6 portions. However, 20% of respondents reported that people should eat between 1 and 4 portions. [\(footnote 10\)](#)

Calories

The UK Government recommend that most adult females require on average 2,000 calories a day and that most adult males require on average 2,500 calories a day.

Respondents were asked how many calories they thought the UK Government and health experts recommend that an average adult female and average adult male should eat every day. In line with recommendations, 52% of respondents reported that an adult female should eat 2,000 calories a day. However, 39% incorrectly identified the recommended daily calorie intake for females, and 9% reported that they did not know. [\(footnote 11\)](#) In line with recommendations, 51% of respondents reported that an adult male should eat 2,500 calories a day. However, 39% incorrectly identified the recommended daily calorie intake for males, 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 and health experts recommend that an adult should not exceed each day. In line with recommendations, 19% of respondents reported that adults should not exceed 6 grams of salt a day. However, 34% of respondents reported that adults should not exceed 2 grams of salt a day, 23% of respondents reported that adults should not exceed 4 grams of salt a day, and 1% of respondents reported that adults should not exceed 8 grams of salt a day. 23% of respondents reported that they did not know. [\(footnote 13\)](#)

Fibre

The UK Government recommends that adults should eat 30 grams of fibre each day.

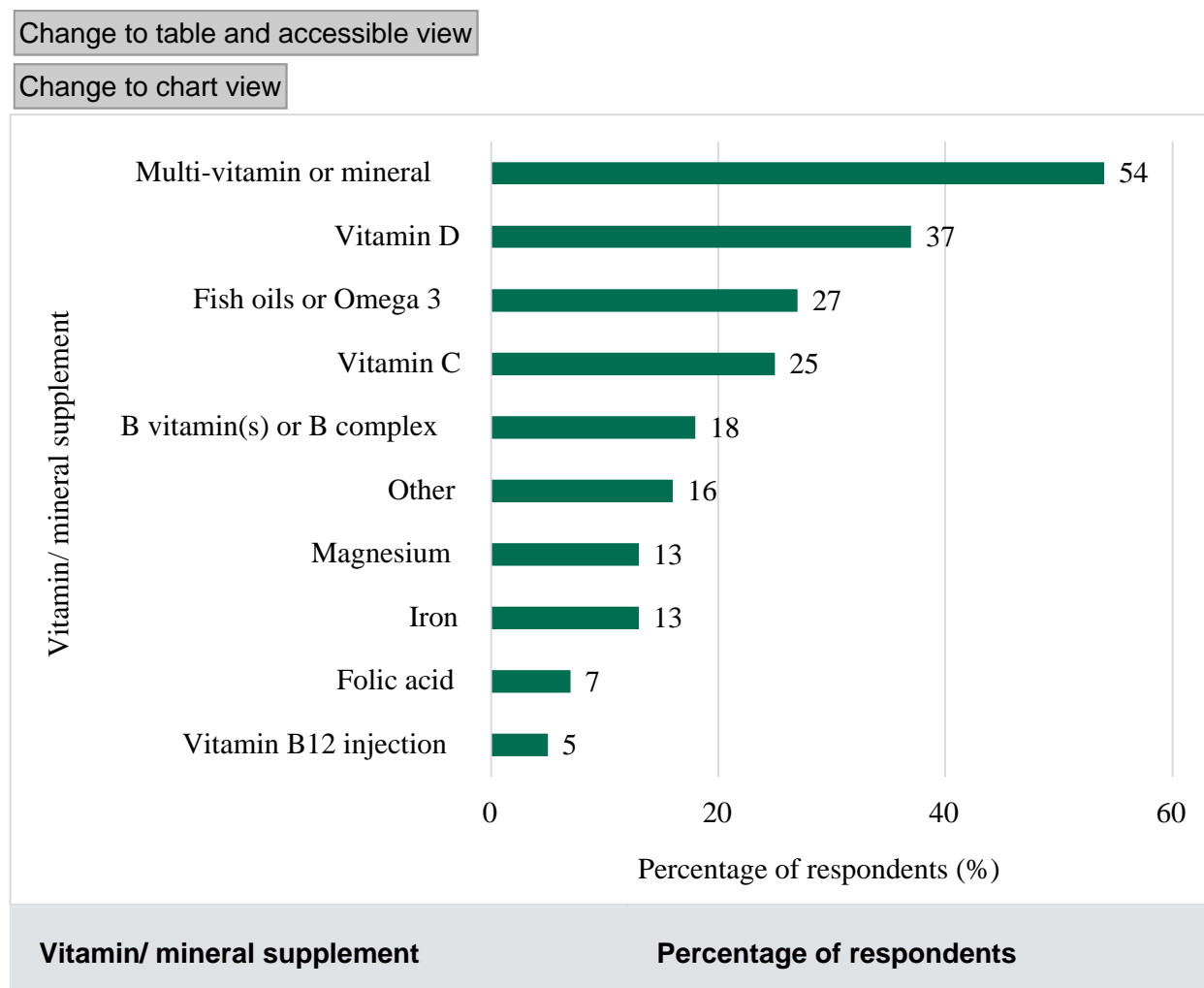
Respondents were asked how much fibre they thought the UK Government and health experts recommend that an adult should eat each day. In line with recommendations, 29% of respondents reported that adults should eat 30 grams of fibre each day. However, 37% reported other levels of fibre, (10g, 20g or 40g) and 34% of respondents reported that they did not know. [\(footnote 14\)](#)

Vitamin and mineral consumption

Respondents were asked whether they are currently taking any vitamin and/or mineral supplements. Half of respondents (50%) reported that they were currently taking a vitamin and/or mineral supplements. [\(footnote 15\)](#)

The most common vitamin and/or mineral supplements respondents reported taking were a multi-vitamin or mineral (54%), Vitamin D (37%), fish oils or Omega 3 (27%) and Vitamin C (25%). Of the options listed, the vitamin/mineral which respondents reported taking least were vitamin B12 injections (5%) and folic acid (7%) (Figure 25). [\(footnote 16\)](#)

Figure 25. Types of vitamin and/or mineral supplements respondents reported taking



Vitamin B12 injection	5
Folic acid	7
Iron	13
Magnesium	13
Other	16
B vitamin(s) or B complex	18
Vitamin C	25
Fish oils or Omega 3	27
Vitamin D	37
Multi-vitamin or mineral	54

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Frequency of vitamin and/or mineral supplement use

Most respondents who took vitamin and/or mineral supplements reported taking them every day (65%). Around a quarter (27%) of respondents reported taking a vitamin and/or mineral supplement most days, and 6% take them less often. [\(footnote 17\)](#)

Reasons for vitamin and/or mineral supplement use

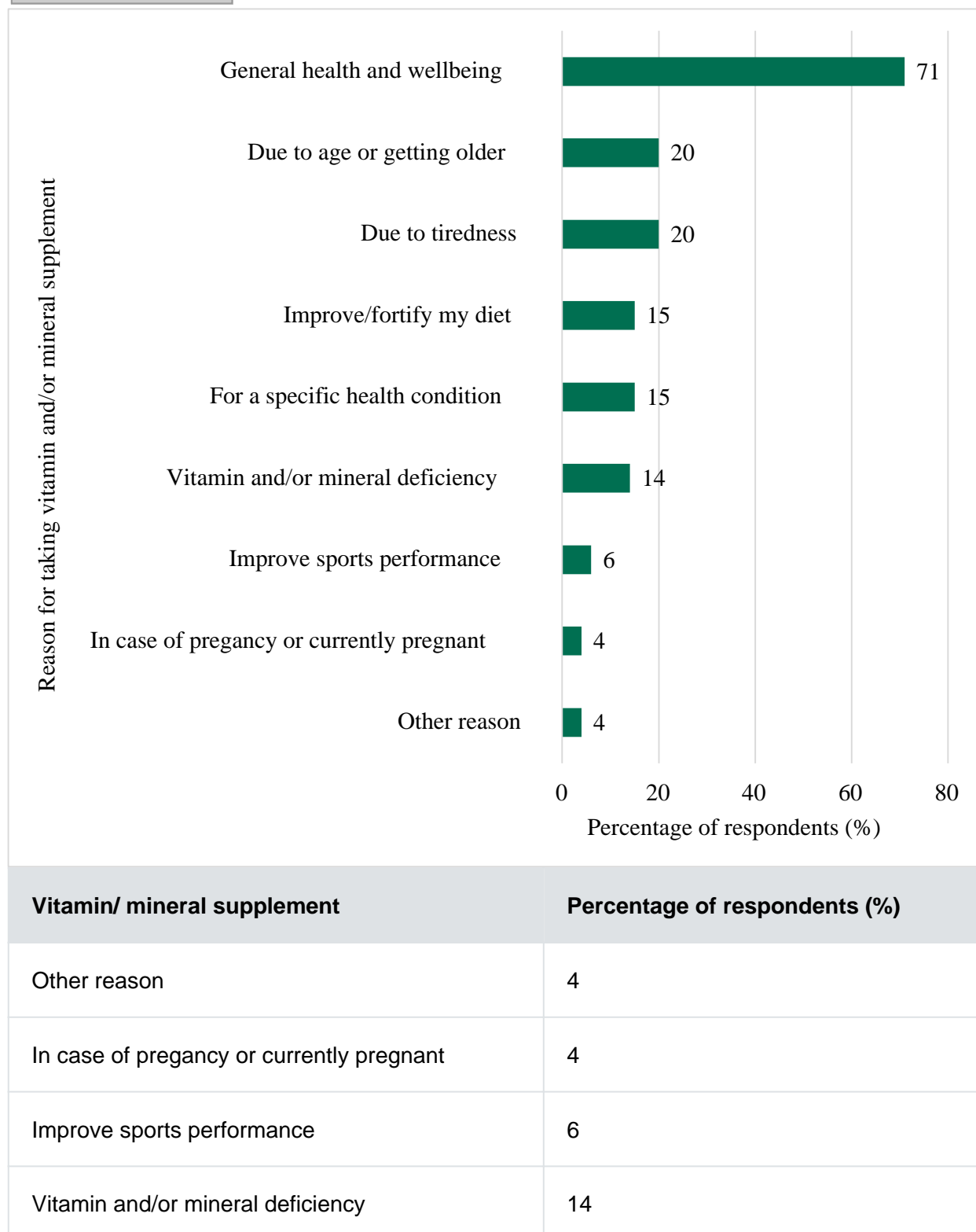
The most common reason for taking vitamin and/or mineral supplements was for general health or wellbeing (71%). A fifth of respondents reported taking a supplement due to tiredness (20%) and due to age or getting older (20%). Respondents were least likely to report taking vitamin and/or mineral supplements to improve sports performance (6%) or for reasons related to pregnancy (4%). [\(footnote 18\)](#)

Most respondents (73%) who reported taking a vitamin and/or mineral supplement had not been advised to take these supplements by a medical professional. Only around a quarter (26%) had been advised by a medical professional to take a vitamin and/or mineral supplement. [\(footnote 19\)](#)

Figure 26. Reasons for vitamin and/or mineral supplement consumption

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Vitamin/ mineral supplement	Percentage of respondents (%)
For a specific health condition	15
Improve/fortify my diet	15
Due to tiredness	20
Due to age or getting older	20
General health and wellbeing	71

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Changes in eating habits

Over half (57%) of respondents reported they had made or attempted to make changes to what they had ate or drank in last 12 months. [\(footnote 20\)](#)

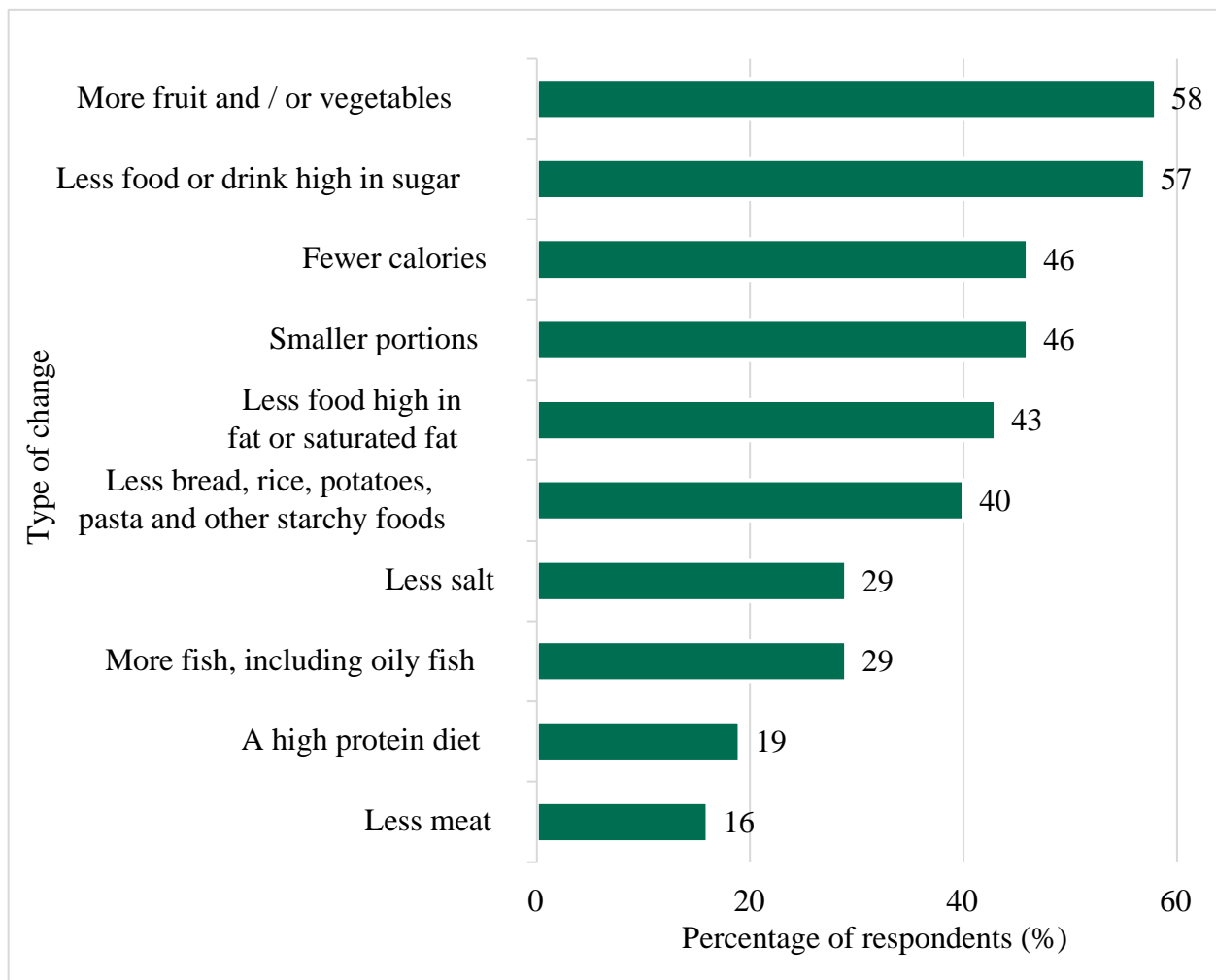
When prompted, the most common changes respondents attempted to make over the previous 12 months were consuming more fruit and/or vegetables (58%), less food or drink high in sugar (57%), fewer calories (46%) and smaller portions (46%) (Figure 27). [\(footnote 21\)](#)

When asked why they had made, or attempted to make, changes to what they ate or drank in the past 12 months, the most common reasons were to be healthier or to have a healthier lifestyle (78%) and to lose weight (65%). [\(footnote 22\)](#)

Figure 27. Ten most common changes or attempted changes to what respondents ate or drank in the previous 12 months.

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Type of change	Percentage of respondents (%)
Less meat	16
A high protein diet	19
More fish, including oily fish	29
Less salt	29
Less bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods	40
Less food high in fat or saturated fat	43
Smaller portions	46

Type of change	Percentage of respondents(%)
Fewer calories	46
Less food or drink high in sugar	57
More fruit and / or vegetables	58

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Eating healthily 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 (86%) thought that the food they eat outside the home is less healthy (i.e. a bit less healthy or a lot less healthy). Only 7% stated that the food they eat out or take out is about the same as the food they eat at home and 4% stated it is healthier than the food they eat at home. [\(footnote 23\)](#)

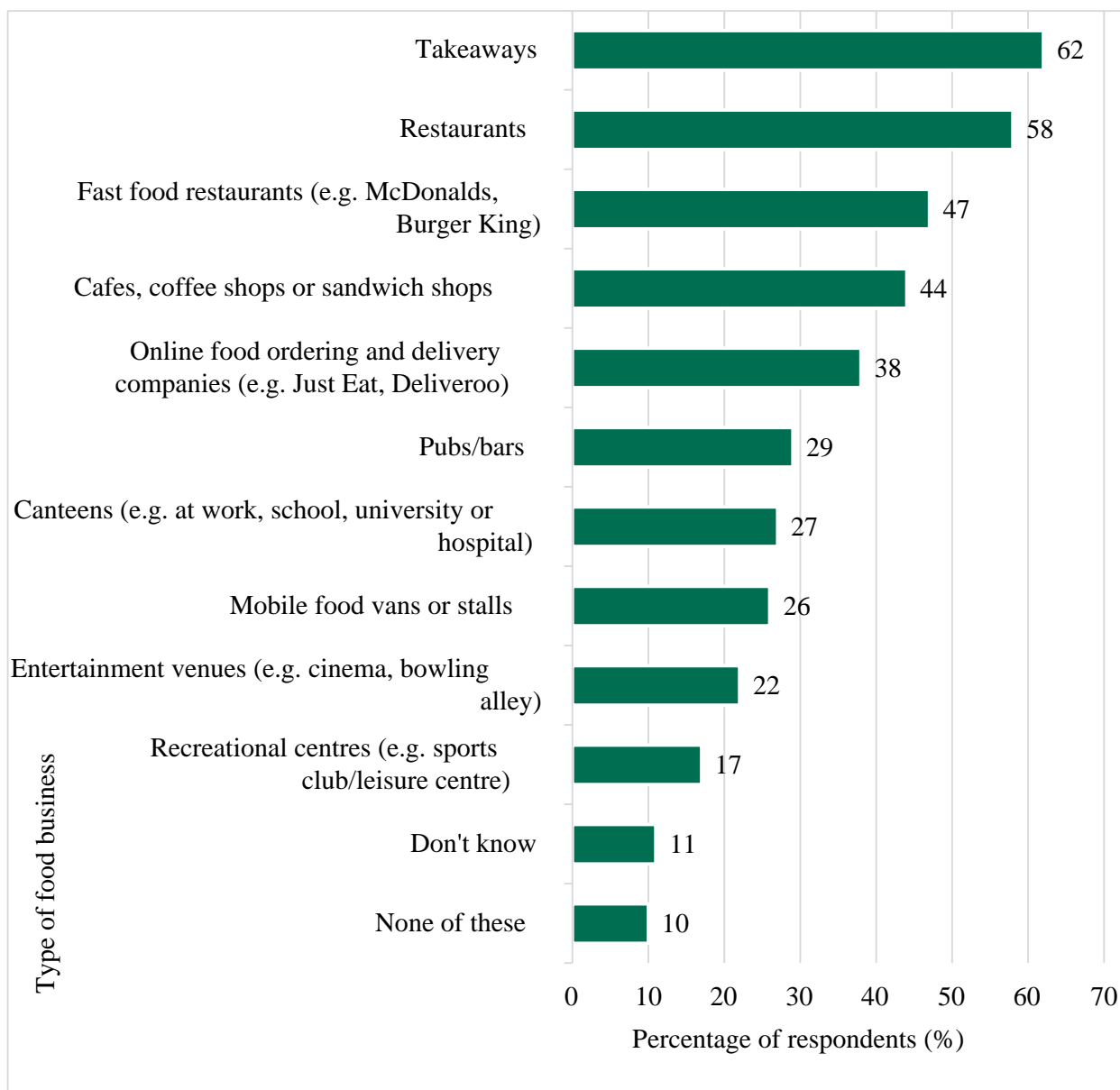
Respondents with high food security (91%) were more likely to report that the food they eat out or take away is less healthy than the food they eat at home, compared to those with low (80%) or very low food security (80%).

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 (62%) and restaurants (58%) to display more information about how healthy different options are. Around half (47%) reported that they would like fast food restaurants (e.g. McDonalds, Burger King) to display this information (Figure 28). [\(footnote 24\)](#)

Figure 28. Where respondents would like to see more information about how healthy different food and drink options are.

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Type of food business	Percentage of respondents (%)
None of these	10
Don't know	11
Recreational centres (e.g. sports club/leisure centre)	17
Entertainment venues (e.g. cinema, bowling alley)	22
Mobile food vans or stalls	26

Type of food business	Percentage of respondents (%)
Canteens (e.g. at work, school, university or hospital)	27
Pubs/bars	29
Online food ordering and delivery companies (e.g. Just Eat, Deliveroo)	38
Cafes, coffee shops or sandwich shops	44
Fast food restaurants (e.g. McDonalds, Burger King)	47
Restaurants	58
Takeaways	62

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Source: Food and You 2: Wave 7

Respondents were asked what nutritional information they would find useful on the menu to help inform their choices when eating out. Around half of respondents reported that they would find it useful if menus showed nutritional information about calorie information (55%), fat content (50%), and sugar content (47%). Around 4 in 10 (43%) respondents reported that it would be useful if menus showed information about salt content and 16% of respondents reported that none of these types of nutritional information would be useful. ([footnote 25](#))

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, don't know, prefer not say. Base = 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
3. Question: Thinking about what you ate and drank yesterday. How many portions of...A) Fruit B) Vegetables...did you eat yesterday? Responses: [open text]. Base= 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.

4. Question: Did you drink a small sized glass of fruit juice or smoothie yesterday?
Responses: 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, Yes - less than a small glass (150ml/5 fluid ounces), Don't know. Base= 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
5. Question: How often do you...? Responses: 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= 1,526, all respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7. B = 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
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), Don't know. Base= 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
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 = 1,526, all respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
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 = 1,526, all respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
9. Question: Which two of the following food groups do you think the UK Government recommends should make up the smallest 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 = 857, all online respondents in Northern Ireland except those who reported "don't know" when asked which food groups the UK Government recommends make up the largest part of our diet. Wave 7.
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: at least 1 portion, at least 2 portions, at least 3 portions, at least 4 portions, at least 5 portions, at least 6 portions, don't know. Base = 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.

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 = 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
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, 3000 calories, don't know. Base = 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
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 = 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
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 = 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
15. Question: Are you currently taking any vitamin and /or mineral supplements? Responses: Yes, No. Base = 1,526, all respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
16. Question: What vitamin and/or mineral supplements do you take? Responses: Multi-vitamin or mineral, B vitamin(s) or B complex, Vitamin B12 injection, Vitamin C, Vitamin D, Fish oils or Omega 3, Folic acid, Iron, Magnesium, Other. Base= 801, all respondents in Northern Ireland that are currently taking any vitamin and /or mineral supplements. Wave 7.
17. Question: How often do you take vitamin and/or mineral supplements? Please think about the vitamin and/or mineral supplements you take most frequently. Responses: Every day, Most days, About once a week, Several times a month, About once a month, Once or a few times over the past year, Can't remember. Base= 801, all respondents in Northern Ireland that are currently taking any vitamin and /or mineral supplements. Wave 7.
18. Question: What do you take vitamin and/or mineral supplements for? Responses: In case of pregnancy or currently pregnant, Vitamin and/or mineral deficiency, Due to tiredness, For general health and wellbeing, Due to age or getting older, For a specific health condition, To improve sports performance, To improve/ fortify my diet, Other reason, Prefer not to say / Don't know. Base= 801, all respondents in Northern Ireland who are currently taking any vitamin and /or mineral supplements. Wave 7.
19. Question: Have you been advised by a medical professional (e.g. a GP or dietician to take these vitamin and/or mineral supplements? Responses: Yes, No, Don't know/ Prefer not to say. Base=468, all online respondents in Northern Ireland that currently take any vitamin and/or mineral supplements. Wave 7.

20. 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 = 1,526, all respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
21. 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 = 856, all respondents in Northern Ireland who have made / attempted to make a change to their diet in the last 12 months. Wave 7.
22. 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 = 856, all respondents in Northern Ireland who have made / attempted to make a change to their diet in the last 12 months. Wave 7.
23. 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= 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
24. Question: In which, if any, of these places would you like to see more information displayed about how healthy different food and drink options are? Responses: Takeaways, Restaurants, Fast food restaurants (e.g. McDonalds, Burger King), Cafes, coffee shops or sandwich shops, Online food ordering and delivery companies (e.g. Just Eat, Deliveroo), Pubs/bars, Mobile food vans or stalls, Canteens (e.g. at work, school, university or hospital), Entertainment venues (e.g. cinema, bowling alley), Recreational centres (e.g. sports club/leisure centre), None of these, Don't know. Base= 871, all online respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.
25. Question: When eating out or buying food to take away, what nutritional information would you find useful on the menu to help inform your choice? Responses: Calorie information, Fat content, Sugar content, Salt content, None of these, Don't know. Base= 1,526, all respondents in Northern Ireland. Wave 7.