

It's Dinnertime:

A Report on Low-Income Families' Efforts to Plan, Shop for and Cook Healthy Meals



January 2012

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ConAgra
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Foundation

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METHODOLOGY

Background & Objectives



Share Our Strength engaged APCO Insight® to conduct a research study among families with low and moderate incomes in order to gain broad-based, statistically significant data on the perceptions, behaviors, motivations and coping mechanisms of low-income American families regarding healthy eating and cooking. The study will inform Share Our Strength's effort to end childhood hunger in America through increasing access to public nutrition programs and educating families on how to provide healthy meals every day through our Cooking Matters program. The research objectives are:

- Explore low-income families' desires and behaviors around food.
- Identify perceived barriers to healthy eating and cooking.
- Assess if participation in public nutrition programs influences behaviors.
- Uncover potential solutions, including tools like cooking-based nutrition education programs.

This study was funded by the ConAgra Foods® Foundation, national sponsor of Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters since 2008.

APCO Insight, the opinion research division of APCO Worldwide, designed and conducted this research.

The research, conducted primarily online with supplemental telephone interviews, surveyed low (<185% poverty-income-ratio) to middle (185-250% poverty-income-ratio) income families in the United States.

Online sample was provided by Research Now™, a professional online panel provider who recruits respondents via email and online marketing. Landline and mobile telephone numbers were called via random digit dialing (RDD) from a purchased sample list provided by Market Systems Group Gensys. Online, landline and mobile telephone samples account for 73%, 23% and 4%, respectively, of the total completed interviews. Quotas were assigned for age, poverty-income-ratio (PIR), race and region to reflect the population. Data have not been weighted.

Eligibility	Poverty Threshold Income Ratio (PIR) < 250% At least one child under 18 years old living in the household Household decision maker for grocery shopping, food budgeting and cooking	
Sample Size	Random sample	n=1500
Sampling error	Margin of error	±2.5%
Confidence Interval	Attain margin of error	95%
Data Collection	Modes of conducting interviews	Computer Aided Web Interviewing (CAWI) Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)
Field Dates	Time in field	Dec. 5 – Dec. 14, 2011
Language	English (CAWI, CATI) & Spanish (CATI)	

Two exploratory focus groups were conducted in Baltimore, MD on November 1, 2011 in order to inform the survey. The key results from this qualitative research can be found in this report's appendix.

For clarity and accuracy, many of the terms and ideas in this survey were defined and examples were provided. Understanding of and comfort with these definitions were assessed in focus groups prior to survey development.

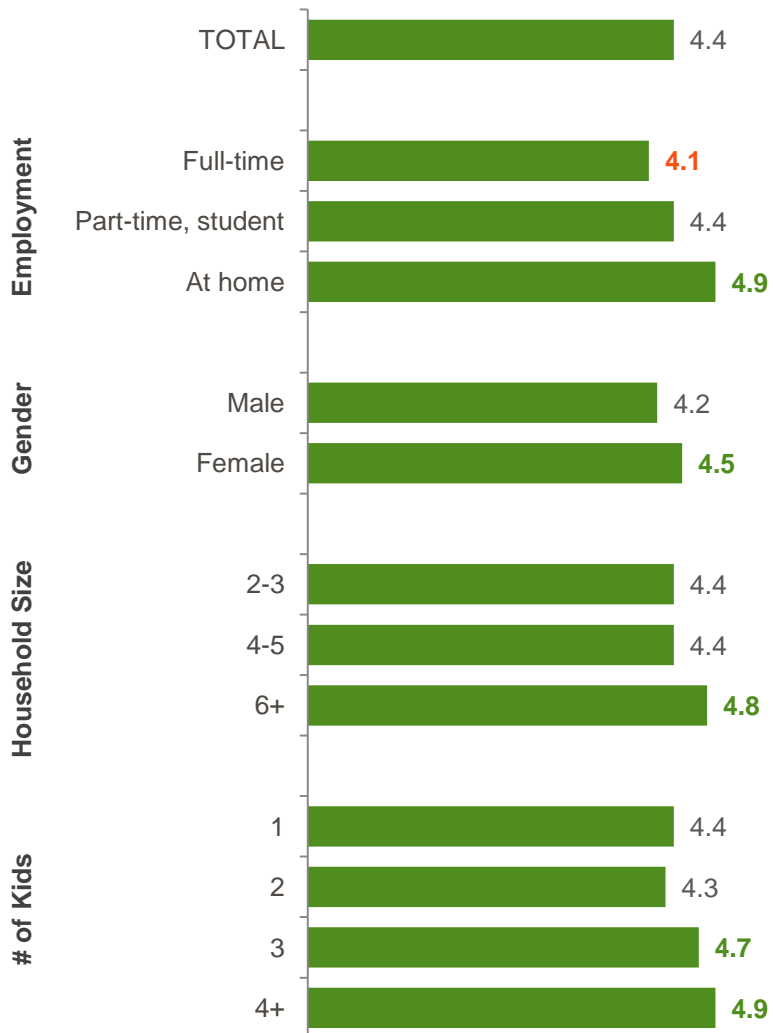
- **Healthy (eating healthy, healthy foods, healthy meals):** *foods like vegetables, fruits, low-fat or fat-free milk products, whole grains, lean meats, and water. “Healthy meals” do not have a lot of extra or added fat, sugar, or salt.*
- **Balanced meal:** *includes fruits or vegetables and at least 2 of the following food groups – protein (such as meat, seafood, beans, tofu or eggs), grains (such as rice, bread or pasta), or dairy (such as milk, cheese or yogurt)*
- **Meal preparation methods:**
 - *...make dinner from **scratch** using mostly basic ingredients (such as eggs, rice, potatoes, spinach, ground meat, etc.)*
 - *...make dinner using **easy-to-prepare, packaged foods** (some examples may be boxed macaroni and cheese, boxed flavored rice, or instant mashed potatoes)*
 - *...make dinner by heating **packaged, pre-made foods** (some examples may be TV dinners, frozen pizza, frozen French fries, canned soup or jar pasta sauce)*
 - *...make dinner using items already **prepared at the store** (some examples may be rotisserie chicken, friend chicken, salads like coleslaw or potato salad, side dishes like rice and beans or grilled vegetables)*

For reporting purposes, the following definitions were used to define respondent types:

- **Low-income:** *<185% poverty-income-ratio, approximately <\$42K a year based on family size*
- **Mid-income:** *185-250% of poverty-income-ratio, approx. \$42K-60K a year based on family size*

Reading the results

Average Number of Times Families Eat Healthy Dinners at Home



- Statistically significant results are highlighted throughout this report. A result is statistically significant if it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. A **bolded orange** data label means that the data point is significantly **lower** than its counterparts. A **bolded green** label means that a data point is significantly **higher** than its counterparts.
- Demographic subgroups that are statistically significant have been highlighted throughout this report. If a subgroup is not mentioned, it can be assumed that there are no statistical differences.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Family Dinners and Dinner Preparation



- **Low-income families are eating dinner together at home most nights of the week, though they are not preparing healthy meals as often.** 78% of families report eating at home most or every day (i.e., five or more times a week), and 2/3 of families report eating together most or every day. On average, families report eating takeout or at a restaurant less than once a week (0.9 and 0.6 respectfully). 53% of families report eating healthy dinners at home most or every day, and even fewer families (45%) say they are making dinner from scratch most or every day. One in 5 families report eating healthy dinners and 1 in 4 report making dinner from scratch less than three times a week.
- **Making dinner from scratch is the most commonly reported preparation method, with dinners made with easy-to-prepare packaged foods as the next most common.** Families reporting making dinner from scratch an average of four times per week. Other methods are used to prepare dinner on other nights; 4 in 5 families say they use easy-to-prepare packaged foods at least once per week and 3 in 4 families say they heat packaged, per-made foods at least once a week. Low-income families make meals from scratch more often than moderate income families.
- **In particular, families where the food decision maker works full time have a harder time eating healthy and making dinners from scratch.** This demographic has a significantly lower average number of healthy or made-from-scratch dinners in a typical week.
- **There are significant gaps between perceived importance and actual behaviors, particularly when it comes to eating balanced, healthy or made from scratch dinners.** There appears to be a disconnect between the importance families place on these activities and how often they are actually doing them. While 85% of families say that eating a healthy dinner is important, over 40% of those who say these types of dinners are important are not actually providing these meals most days of the week.

Barriers to Healthy Eating & Cooking



- **Most families don't agree that the assessed barriers keep them from cooking healthy meals.** The data suggest that families believe they can overcome the listed obstacles and those who eat healthy meals most often are more likely to disagree that the barriers are an issue for their families. Price, time and conflicting schedules are the most commonly agreed upon obstacles (20-30% agree).
- **Most families are satisfied with their shopping options when it comes to accessing healthy groceries, but many fewer are happy with how much they cost.** At least 60% of families are satisfied with their grocery stores when it comes to providing quality, variety and stocked healthy groceries. In comparison, satisfaction with the price of healthy groceries is cut in half to only 30% and approximately 1 in 5 families say they are extremely dissatisfied with price.
- **Indeed, some families refrain from purchasing healthy items they want because they can't afford them.** 1 in 4 families report skipping healthy purchases often or always due to price.
- **There is potential to help ease the pain of price by educating families about the nutritional value of frozen and canned fruits and vegetables.** While families clearly understand the nutritional value of fresh produce (81% say fresh fruits and vegetables are extremely healthy), the data suggest there may be a lack of understanding for the comparable health benefits of frozen and canned produce. Dramatically fewer parents (32%) rated frozen fruits and vegetables as extremely healthy and only 12% rated canned fruits and vegetables as extremely healthy.
- **Despite these barriers, the vast majority of families say that cooking healthy meals is an attainable goal and many are eager to learn more in order to better reach it.** 3 in 4 families agree that cooking healthy meals is realistic for their family. 4 in 5 families say they are interested in learning more about cooking healthy meals.

Grocery Shopping, Planning & Budgeting



- **Families report most commonly patronizing discount retailers and traditional grocery stores and doing their primary grocery shopping on a weekly basis.** At least 87% of respondents had shopped at a discount retailer (such as Super Walmart or Target) or a traditional grocery store at least once in the past month and at least one-third visited these retailers 4 or more times in the month. About half of respondents (51%) report primarily shopping for groceries on a weekly basis. SNAP participants are more than twice as likely (32% versus 14%) to report shopping primarily at the beginning of the month, presumably when SNAP benefits are made available.
- **Families that regularly practice positive budgeting and planning behaviors, particularly using written grocery lists and planning meals before shopping, are the same families who eat healthy, balanced or made from scratch dinners most days of the week.** Families that always or often participate in these behaviors are significantly more likely to provide these types of meals 5 or more times a week. However, overall 35% and 55% of survey respondents don't regularly use written grocery lists or plan meals before going to the store, respectively.
- **Families show a strong interest in learning how to better budget their money for meals.** 2 in 3 families are interested in learning how to better budget their money for meals and 4 in 10 are *extremely* interested.

Some Key Demographic Differences

- Overall, low-income families and middle-income families have similar satisfaction levels regarding access to, variety, and quality of healthy groceries. However, significantly more low-income families report they are extremely satisfied with the attributes of their food environment, and also are more likely to eat healthy, balanced, and made-from scratch meals on a regular basis (especially when they practice key food budgeting behaviors). These findings underscore the power of using key food budgeting skills within a limited food environment.
- Differences between low-income families who participate in federal food assistance programs such as SNAP or WIC and those who don't are behavioral.
 - *Families who participate in SNAP and WIC are more likely to eat dinner made at home 5 or more times a week (82% to 73%); they are also more likely to make these dinners using mostly easy-to-prepare, packaged foods (2.3 on average to 1.8) and pre-made, packaged foods (1.6 on average to 1.3).*
 - *Low income families who participate in these programs are more likely to agree that price is a major barrier to cooking healthy meals (15% to 11%), and are more likely to budget how much they can spend (72% to 62%).*
 - *All low income families show greater interest than moderate income families in learning new skills for most of the assessed activities on learning how to cook and budget for healthy meals, but those who participate in government food assistance programs are even more likely to be extremely interested for 4 of the 9 activities.*
- When shopping for groceries, urban families tend to be the most satisfied with accessibility, quantity, and quality or variety of healthy groceries, though a majority of rural families are also satisfied with these same attributes. Specifically, rural families are significantly less satisfied with accessibility (69%) than urban families(77%).

The Bottom Line



- Families are eating most meals at home and know that having healthy dinners is important, yet families sometimes struggle to provide them, largely because of the perceived higher cost and time investment.
- Basic budgeting and planning skills can help. Those who already know and regularly practice some planning and budgeting behaviors are the same families who eat healthy dinners most days of the week.
- Families believe cooking healthy meals is an attainable goal and are eager for tips and educational tools that will make preparing healthy meals easier and more affordable.
- **Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters can provide a solution.** It is designed to empower these families with the skills, knowledge and confidence to prepare healthy and affordable meals. Cooking Matters teaches families how to select nutritious and low-cost ingredients and prepare them in ways that provide the best nourishment possible for their families.

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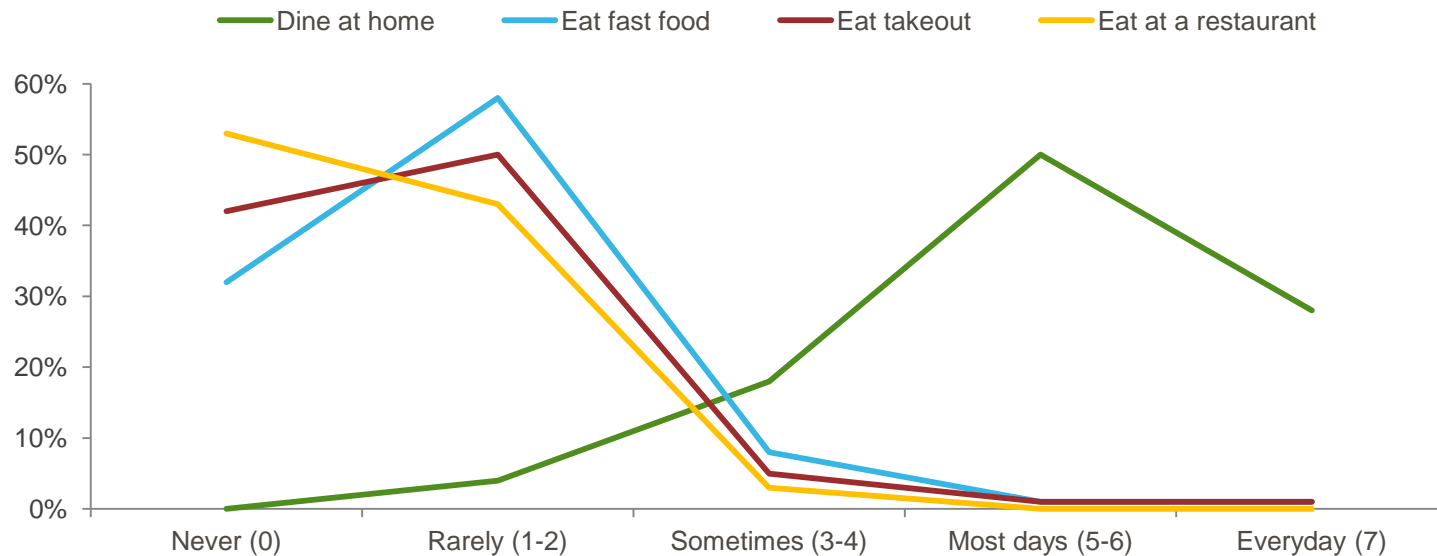
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FAMILY DINNERS

78% of families surveyed are making and eating dinner at home 5 or more times a week

- If families eat food prepared outside the home for dinner, it is most likely fast food. 58% report eating fast food for dinner once or twice a week.
- Eating food prepared at a restaurant or store is rare among this population. Whether having takeout or dining out, about one in two families say this is something they do not do in a typical week.

Frequency of Family Dinner Behaviors

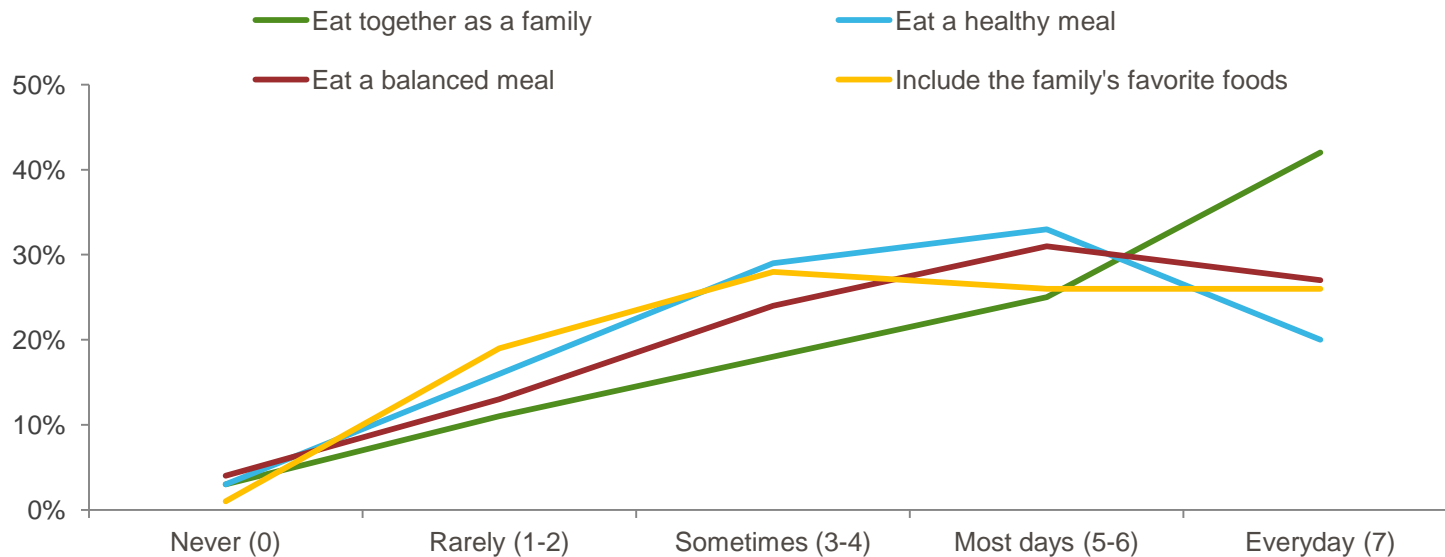


Thinking about a typical week, how many times does your family do each of the following for dinner ...?

About 1 in 2 families say they are eating healthy dinners 5 or more times a week

- In a typical week, 53% of families report that they eat healthy dinners and 58% say they eat balanced dinners most days or every day. About 1 in 5 families report eating healthy dinners no more than twice a week.
- Surveyed families are also making an effort to eat dinner together. 67% say they eat together as a family at least 5 times a week.

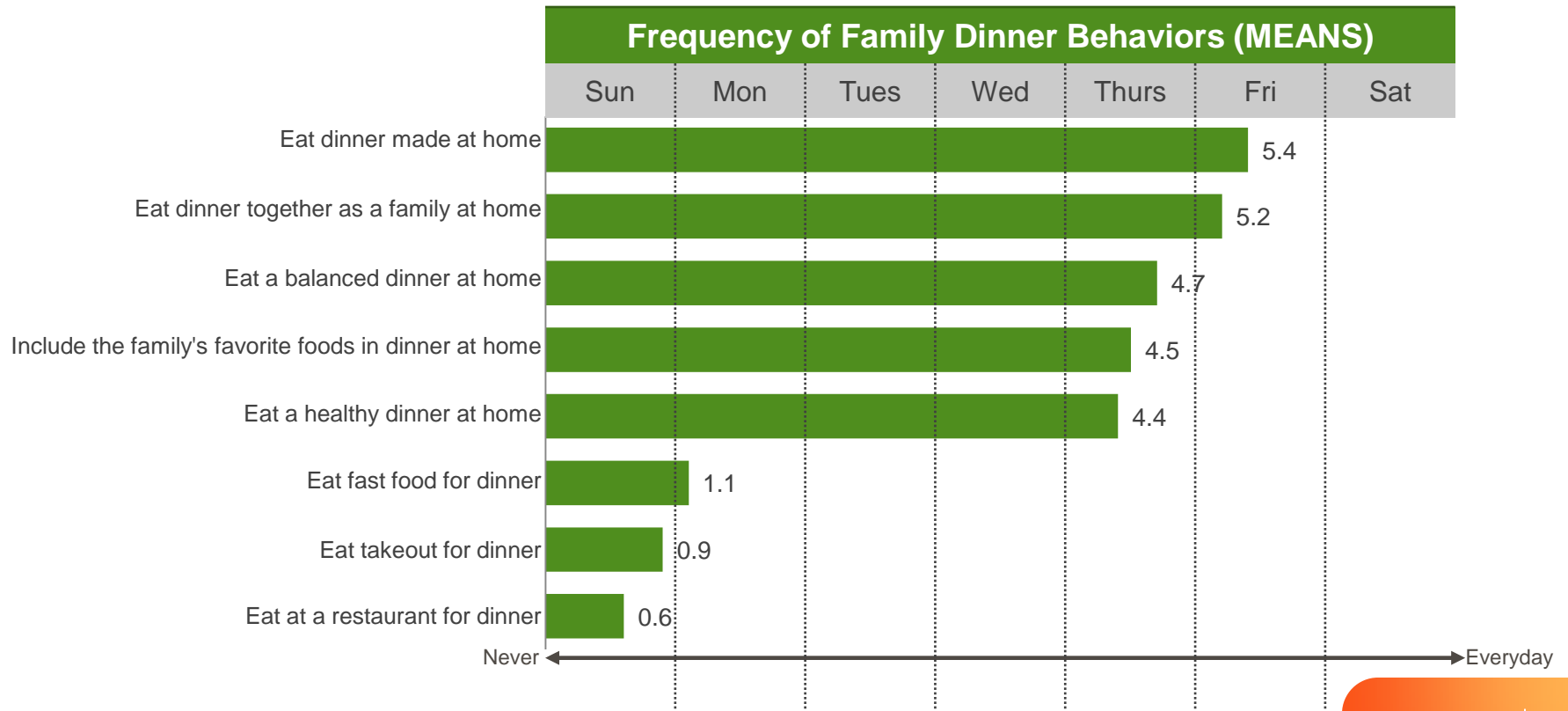
Frequency of Family Dinner Behaviors (at Home)



On average, families report eating dinner made at home 5.4 times a week and healthy dinners 4.4 times a week



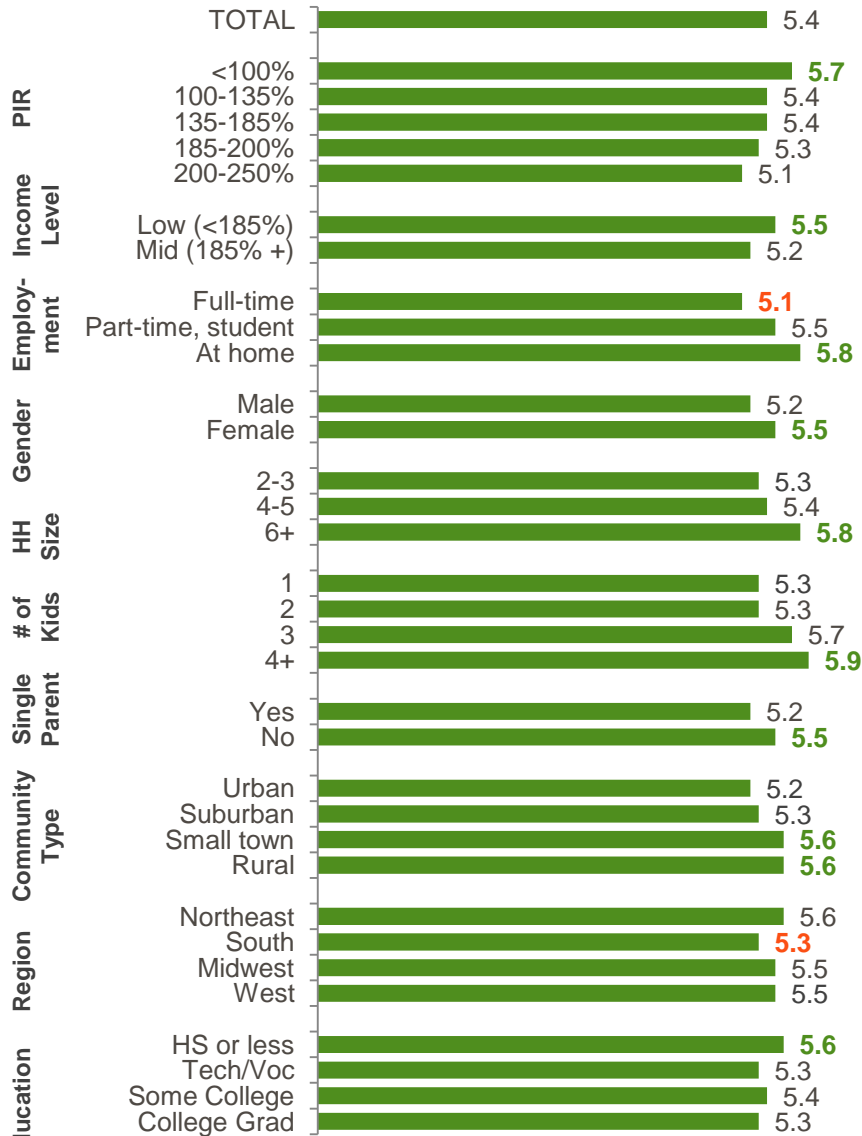
- Balanced dinners (average 4.7 times per week) are more common than healthy dinners (4.4).
- Again, if dinner is prepared outside of the home, it is most likely to be fast food. Families are eating fast food for dinner an average of once a week.
- Interestingly, younger moms are the biggest supporters of eating dinner together as a family. 18-34 year old females report eating together an average of 5.5 times a week, significantly more than any other age/gender demographic group.



Thinking about a typical week, how many times does your family do each of the following for dinner ...?
Thinking about a typical week, how many times does your family do the following at home...?

Several demographic categories appear to play a role in how often families eat dinner made at home

Average Number of Times Families Eat Dinners Made At Home

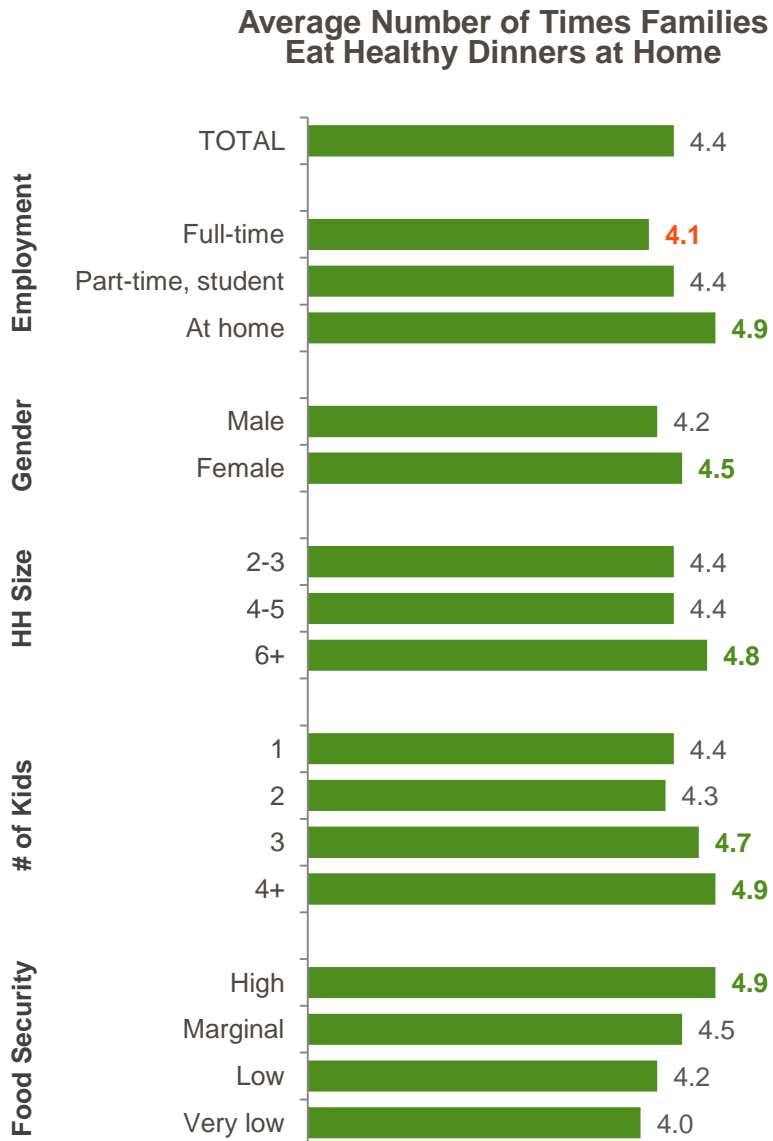


The chart at left highlights those demographic categories where statistically significant differences were found:

- As **income** decreases, eating dinner made at home increases.
- More time allows families to make more dinners at home. Families with a guardian who is a **homemaker, unemployed, disabled, etc.** have significantly more meals made at home than those who are **employed full** or part time.
- When the family's food decision maker is **female**, families eat dinner at home significantly more.
- Household composition also plays a role. Those in **larger households (6+)** with **more children (3+)** have significantly more meals at home.
- Families in **small towns and rural communities** are more likely to eat dinner made at home, while those in the **South** are less likely to eat dinner made at home.
- Closely correlated with income, those families with **lower education levels** are more likely to eat dinner made at home.

Thinking about a typical week, how many times does your family do each of the following for dinner ...?

How often families eat healthy dinners can vary depending upon employment, gender and family composition



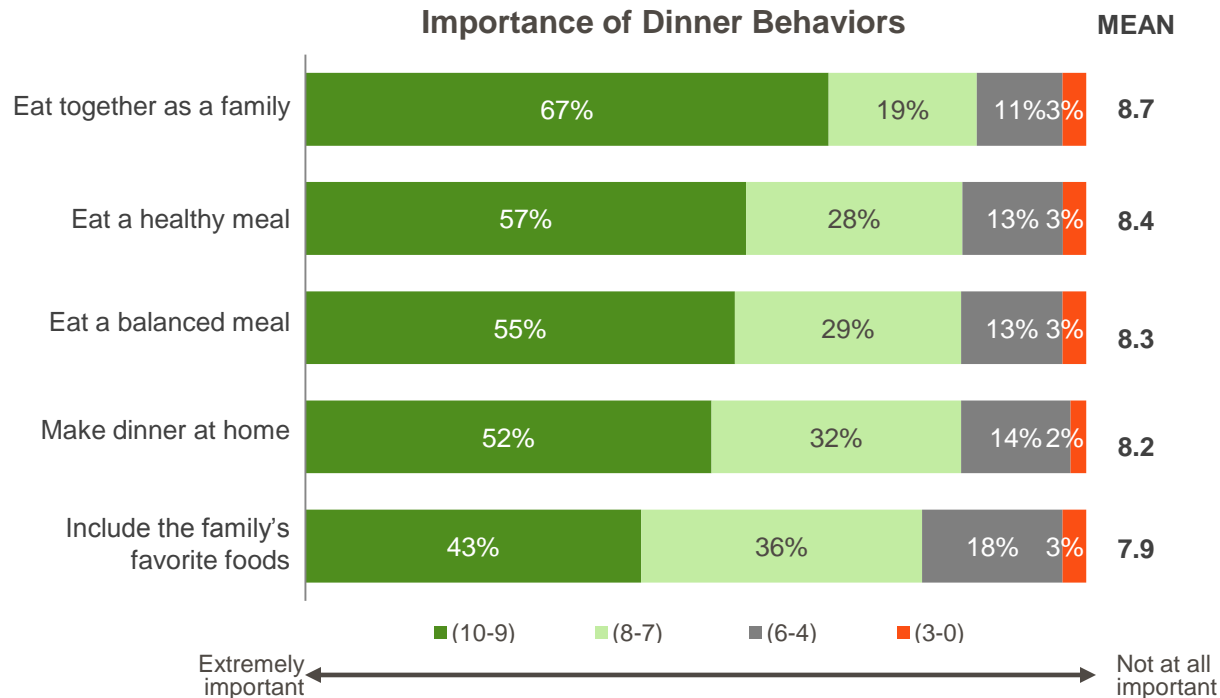
The chart at left highlights those demographic categories where statistically significant differences were found:

- More time allows families to not only make more dinners at home, but also more *healthy* dinners. Families with a guardian who is a **homemaker, unemployed, disabled, etc.** make significantly more healthy meals in a typical week than those who are **employed full** or part time.
- Families where **mothers or grandmothers** make the food decisions have significantly more healthy meals.
- Again, household composition plays a role. Those in **larger households (6+)** and with **more children (3+)** have significantly more healthy meals.
- Families with **high food security** report having the highest number of healthy meals in a typical week.

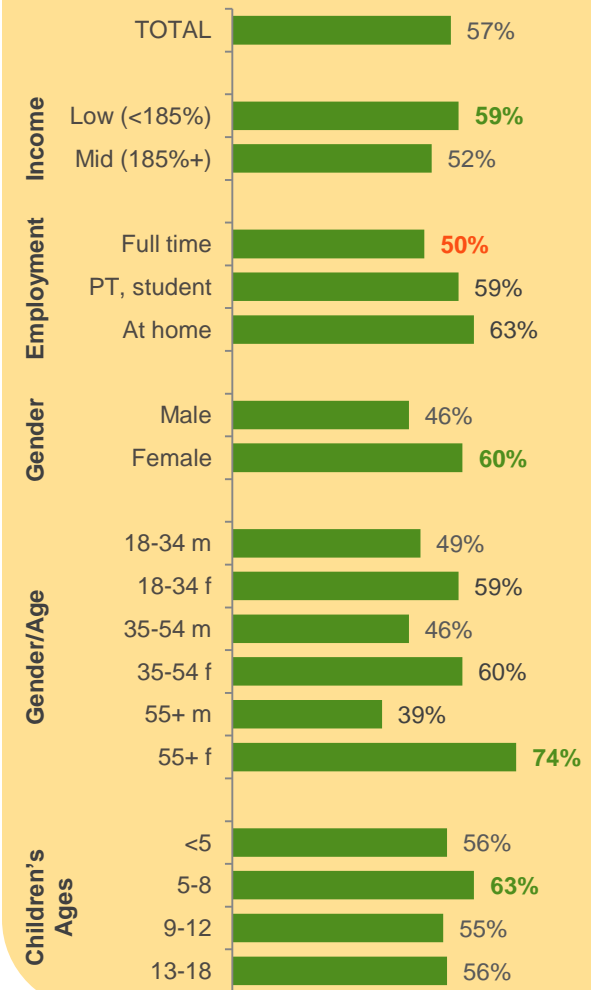
85% of respondents say that eating healthy dinners is important to their families



- Comparatively, eating dinner together as a family is seen as most important. Two-thirds of surveyed families rated this activity as a 9 or 10 on a 10 point scale.
- 1 out of 2 respondents say making dinner at home is extremely important.
- Low-income, females (particularly those over 55), and/or families with children between 5-8 years of age place more importance on eating healthy dinners than do their counterparts.



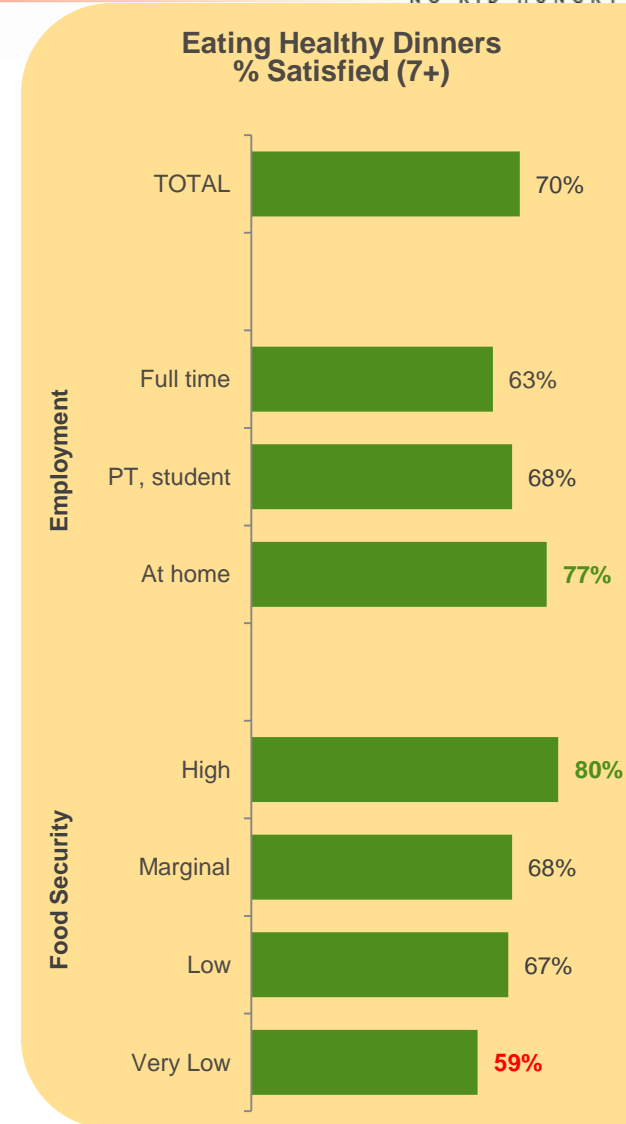
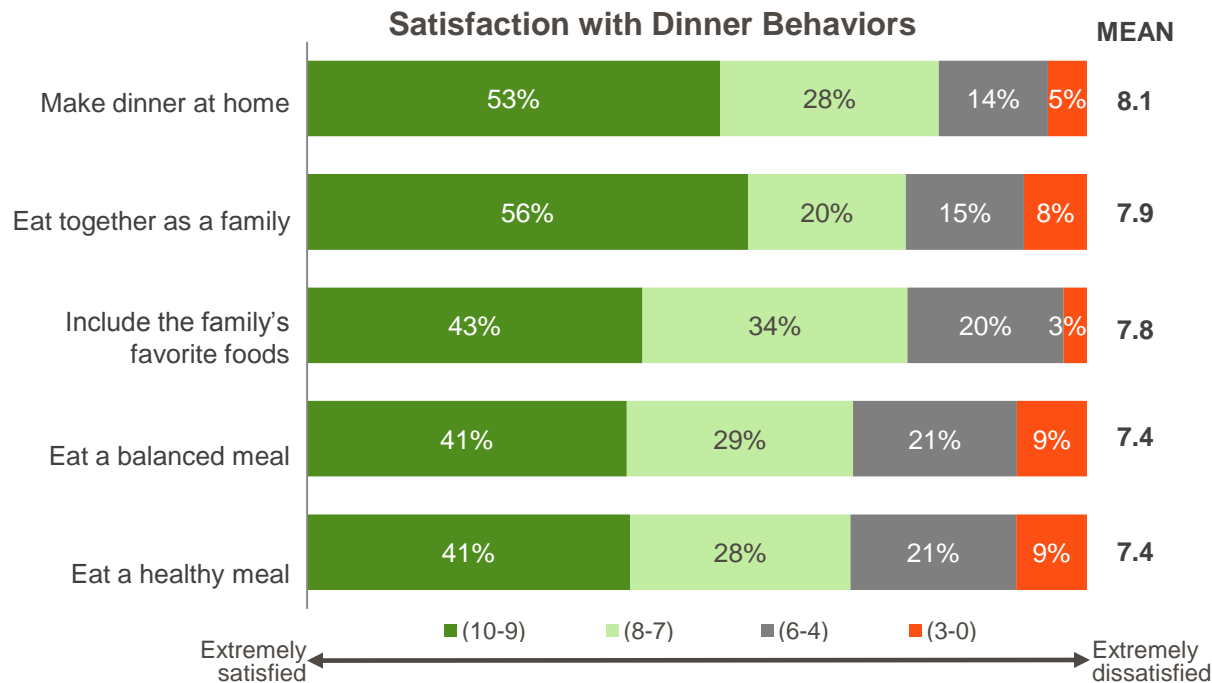
Eating Healthy Dinners % Extremely Important (9-10)



Please tell me how important each of the following is to your family. Please rate your answer using any number on a scale from zero (0) to ten (10) where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important." How important is it to you that your family...?

Satisfaction rates are higher than initially expected among this population

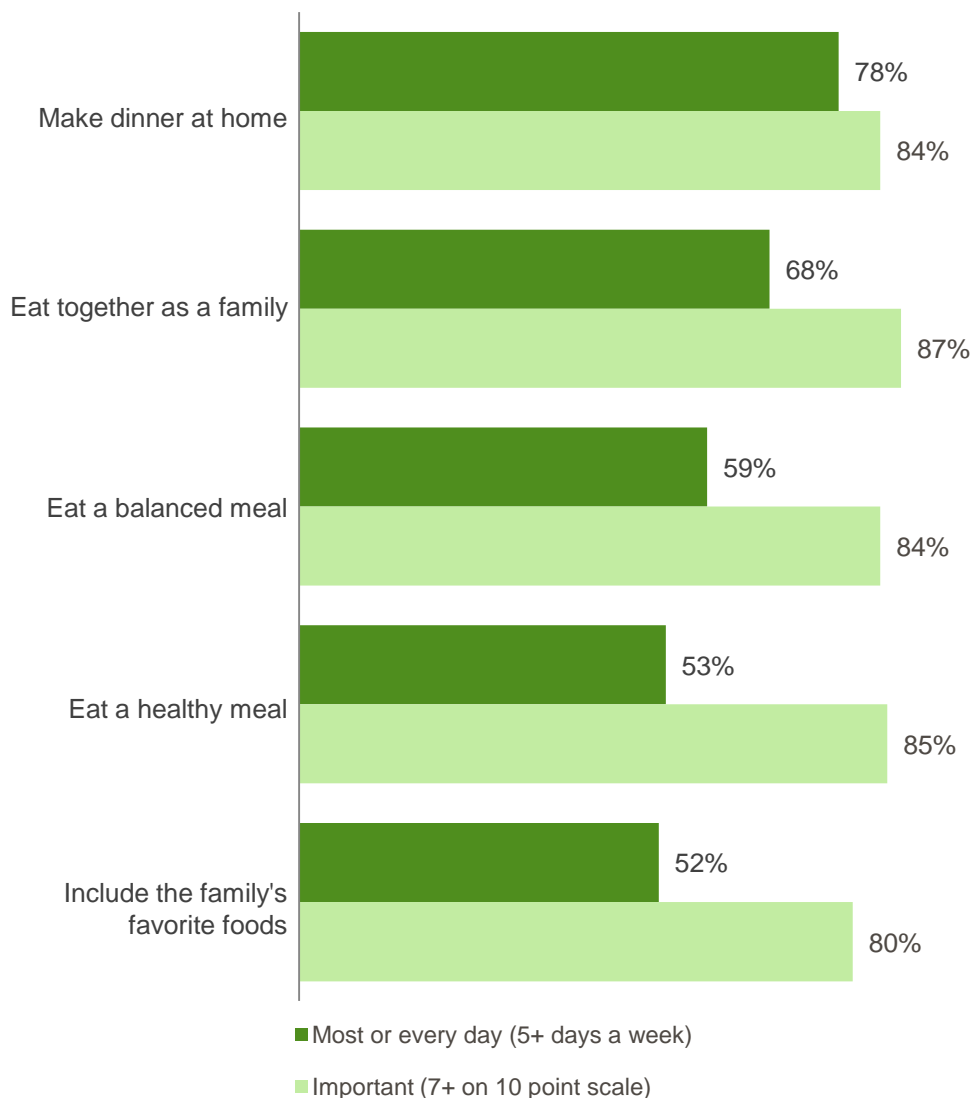
- Interestingly, at least two thirds of families say they are satisfied with their dinner habits when it comes to the assessed behaviors.
- Based on initial qualitative research, satisfaction ratings may be due to the fact that families feel they are doing the best they can.
- Still, comparatively, satisfaction levels for how often families are eating healthy and balanced dinners rank lowest. Satisfaction for eating healthy dinners is significantly lower among parents who work and families with very low food security.



Please tell me how satisfied you are with the amount of times that your family does each of the following in a typical week. Please rate your answer using any number on a scale from zero (0) to ten (10) where 0 is "extremely dissatisfied" and 10 is "extremely satisfied." Thinking about a typical week, how satisfied are you with the amount of times that your family...?

There is a significant gap between perceived importance and actual behaviors

Comparing Behaviors & Importance with Dinner Behaviors (at home)



- There appears to be a disconnect between the importance families place on these activities and how often they are actually doing them.
- The largest gap is for eating healthy meals. 85% of families say it is important to eat healthy meals, but many fewer (53%) are actually eating healthy meals most days of the week. In fact, 40% of families who say it is important are not providing healthy meals most days.

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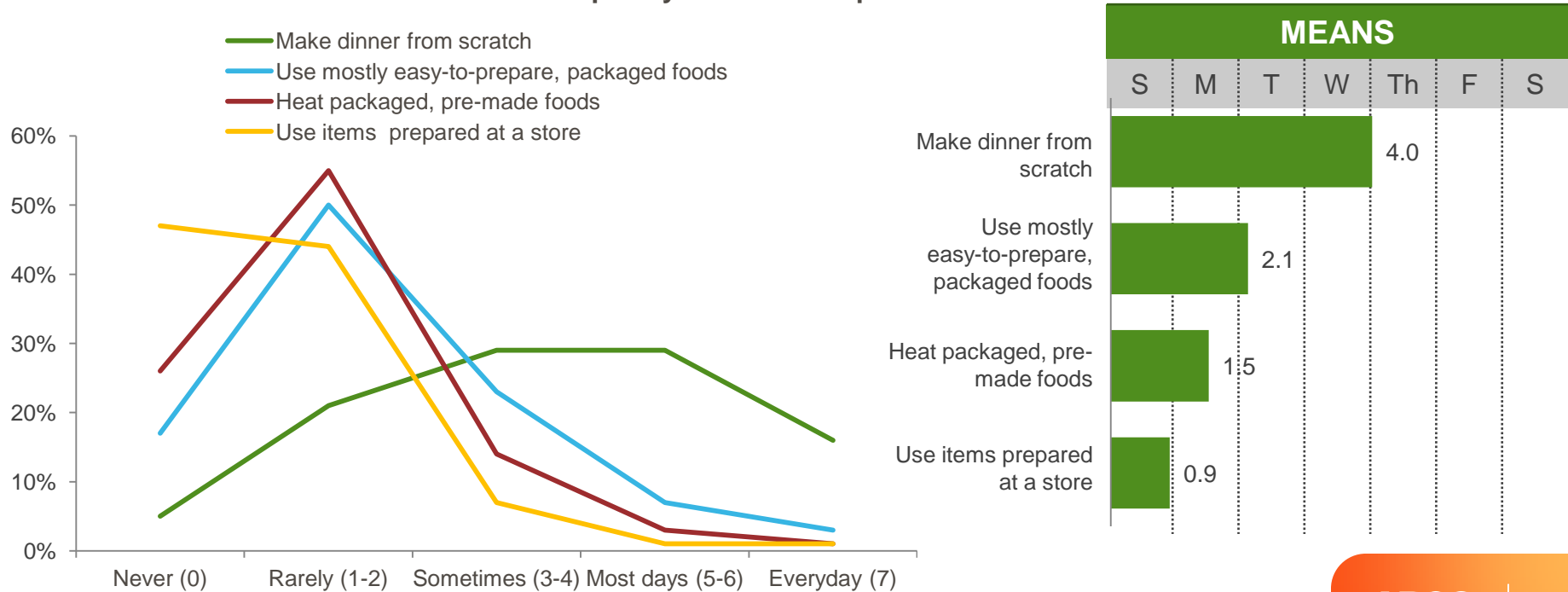
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DINNER PREPARATION

In a typical week, families say they are most likely to make dinner from scratch; 4 days a week on average

- 78% of parents report making and eating dinner at home 5 or more times a week, and 45% say they are making dinner from scratch 5 or more times a week. 1 in 4 families make dinner from scratch no more than twice a week.
- While making dinner from scratch is the most commonly reported preparation for dinner, clearly families are preparing foods other ways as well. Easy-to-prepare, packaged foods are the most likely supplement to made-from-scratch meals, with only 17% saying that they never prepare these types of products in a typical week.

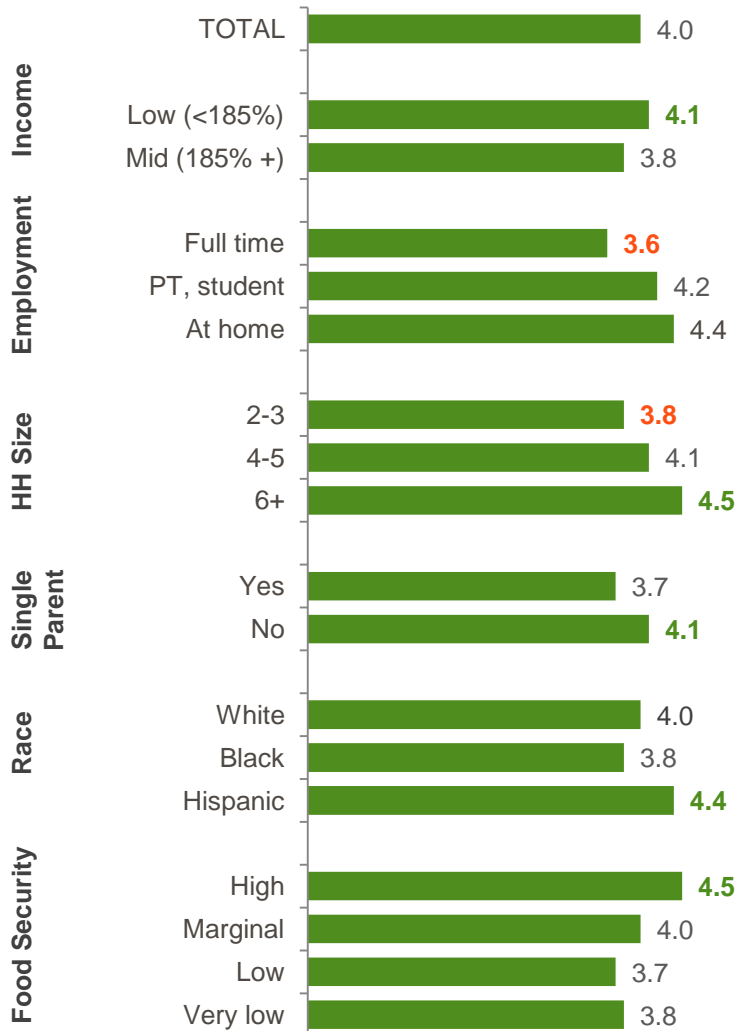
Frequency of Dinner Preparation Behaviors



Thinking about a typical week, how many times does your family do the following at home ...?

How often families make dinner from scratch can vary by income, employment, family composition and race

Average Number of Times Families Make Dinner from Scratch



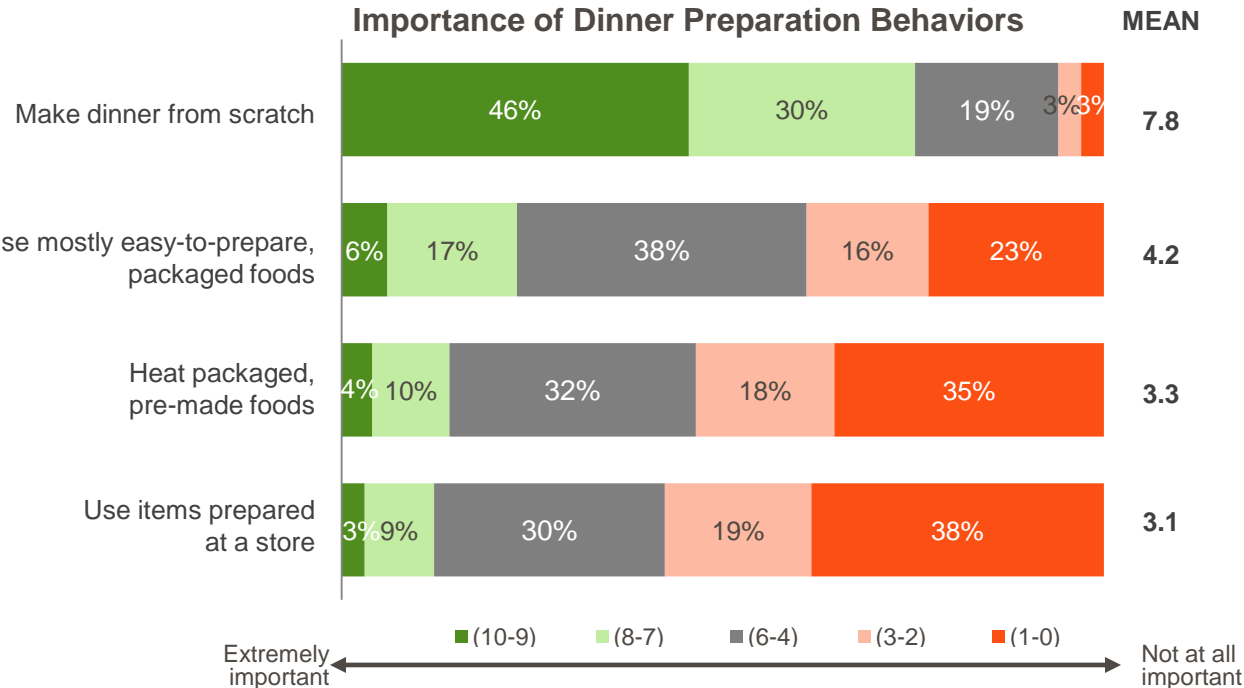
The chart at left highlights those demographic categories where statistically significant differences were found:

- Families with an **income below 185%** of the poverty threshold make more meals from scratch on average than those with an income 185%-250%.
- Similar to eating and cooking at home in general, families with a guardian who is **employed full time** make significantly fewer meals from scratch in a typical week than someone who works part time or is a student, homemaker, unemployed, disabled, etc.
- Again, household composition plays a role. Those in **larger households (6+)** and with **numerous adults** make significantly more meals from scratch.
- Interestingly, making dinner from scratch is more common in **Hispanic** households.
- Just as families with **high food security** eat and cook at home more often, they also make dinner from scratch significantly more often.

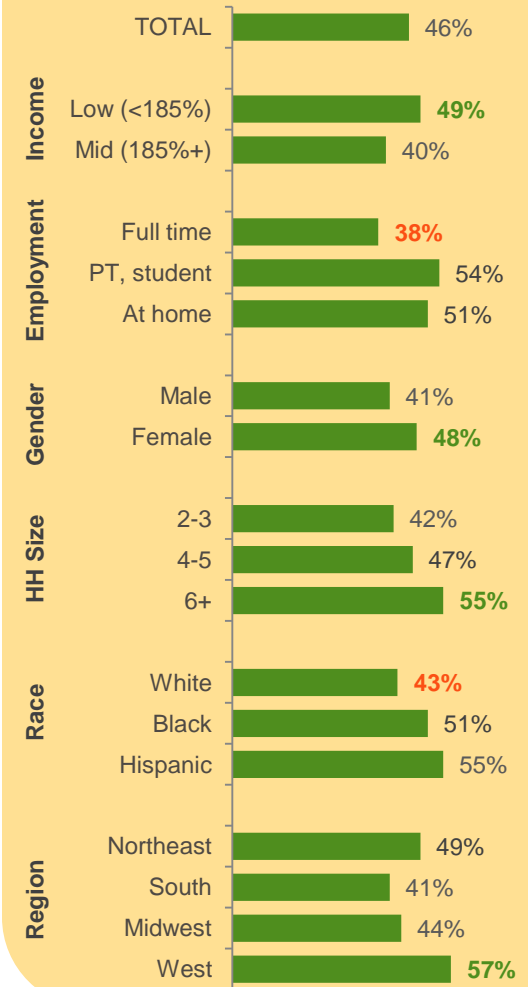
76% of families say that making dinner from scratch is important to their families



- 46% report that making dinner from scratch is extremely important.
- 1 in 4 families say that making dinner using easy-to-prepare, packaged foods is also important.
- 1 in 2 families do not believe using packaged, pre-made foods or items prepared at a store is important.



Make Dinner from Scratch % Extremely Important (9-10)

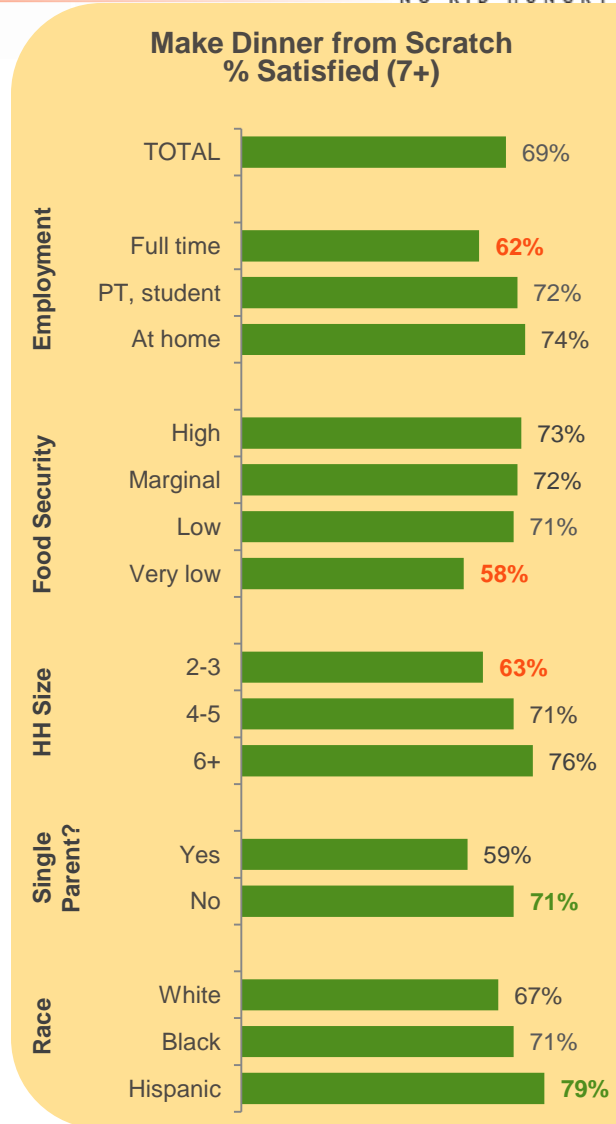
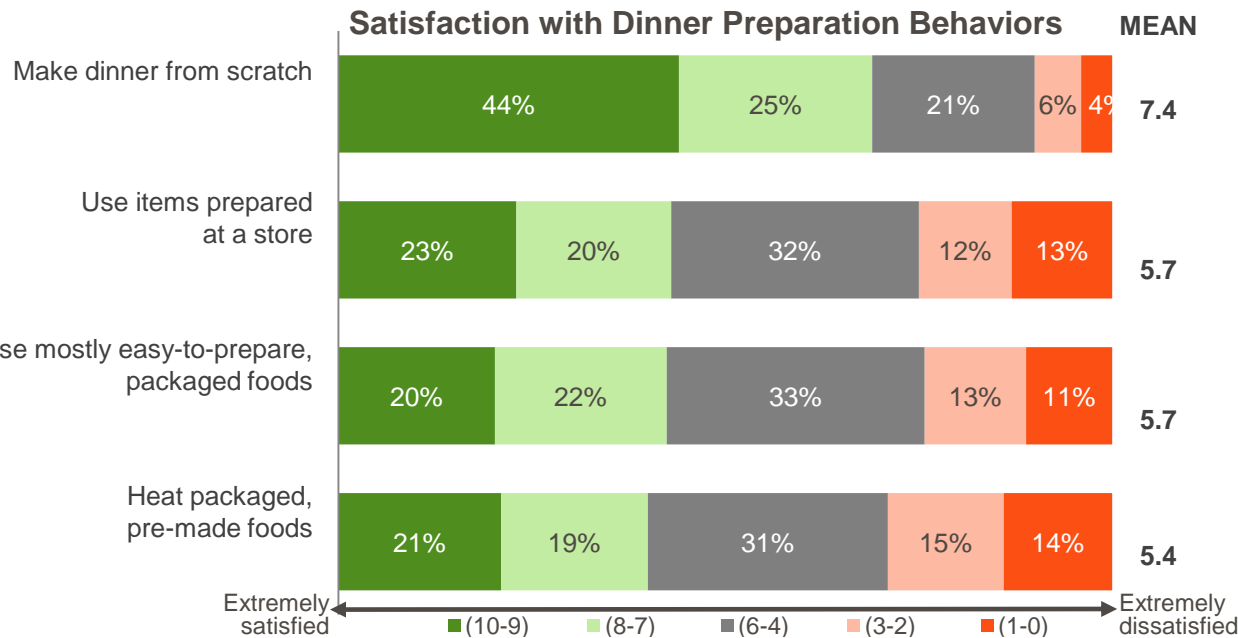


Please tell me how important each of the following is to your family. Please rate your answer using any number on a scale from zero (0) to ten (10) where 0 is "not at all important" and 10 is "extremely important." How important is it to you that your family...?

High satisfaction regarding the frequency of making dinner from scratch



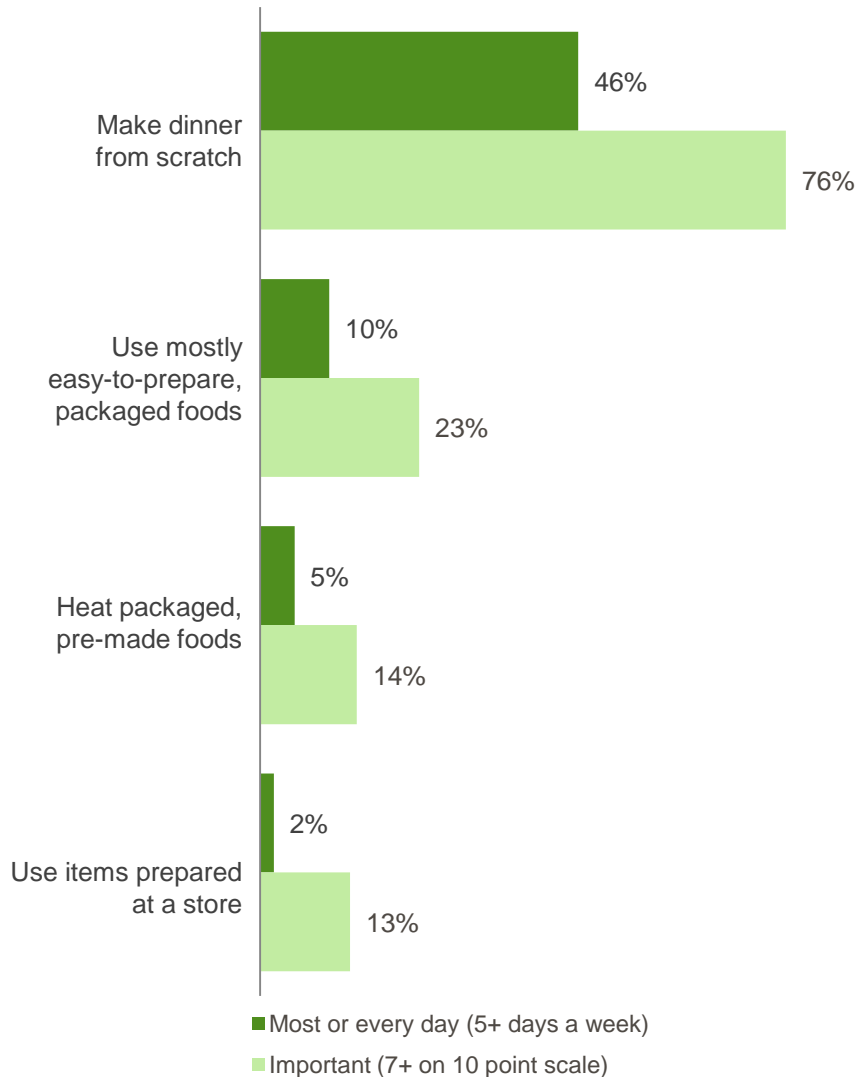
- The majority of families (69%) are satisfied with the number of times they make dinner from scratch.
- However, there is a proportion of families that are dissatisfied with how often they use easy-to-prepare, packaged foods (24%) and packaged, pre-made foods (29%).
- Families who work full-time, have very low food security and have smaller households (2-3 members total and 1 child) are significantly less likely to report being extremely satisfied with the number of times they make dinner from scratch. Hispanic and homes with multiple adults are more likely to be satisfied.



Please tell me how satisfied you are with the amount of times that your family does each of the following in a typical week. Please rate your answer using any number on a scale from zero (0) to ten (10) where 0 is "extremely dissatisfied" and 10 is "extremely satisfied." Thinking about a typical week, how satisfied are you with the amount of times that your family...?

3 of 4 families say making dinner from scratch is important, but fewer than half are doing so often

Comparing Behaviors & Importance with Dinner Preparation Methods



- Again, we see significant gaps between importance and behavior.
- 76 percent of families say making dinner from scratch is important, but only 46% are actually providing made from scratch dinners most or every day. In fact, 45% of those families who say making dinner from scratch is important are not doing so most or every day.

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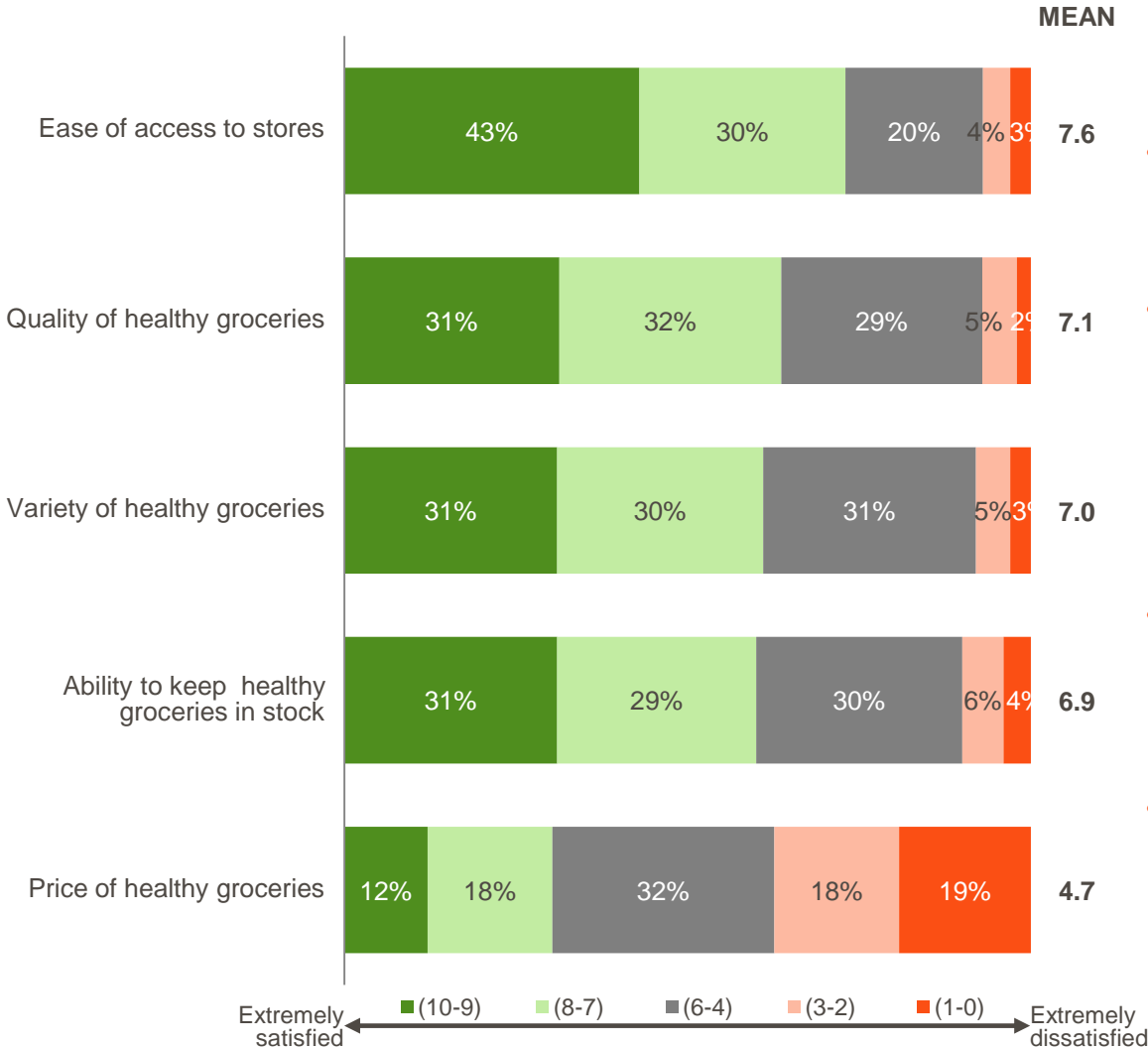
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BARRIERS TO HEALTHY EATING & COOKING

With the exception of price, most families are satisfied with the healthy items provided by their grocery stores



Satisfaction with Grocery Options

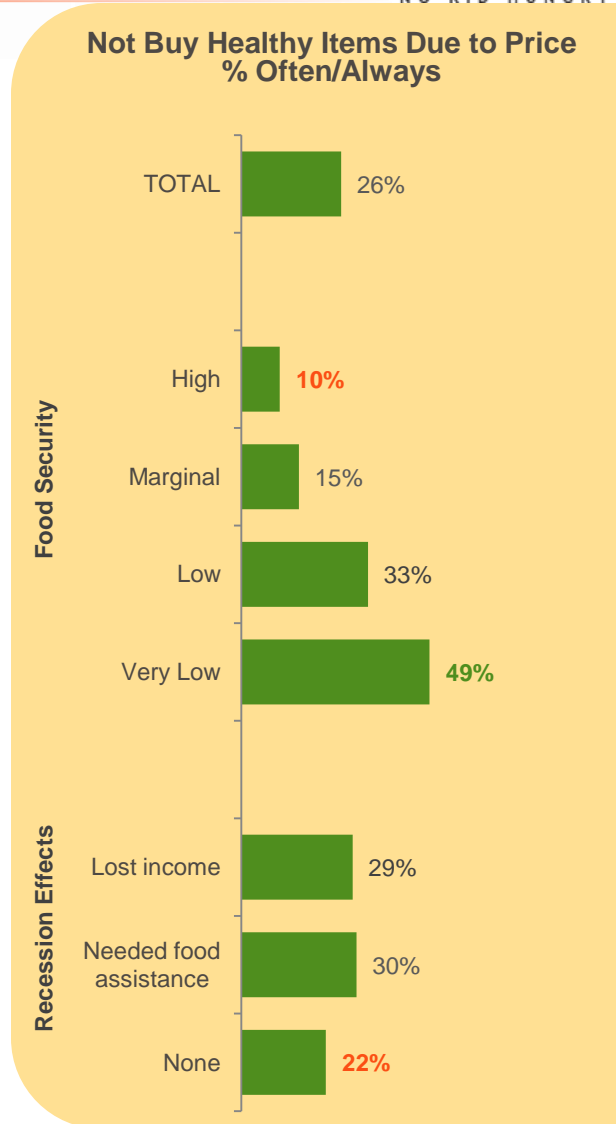
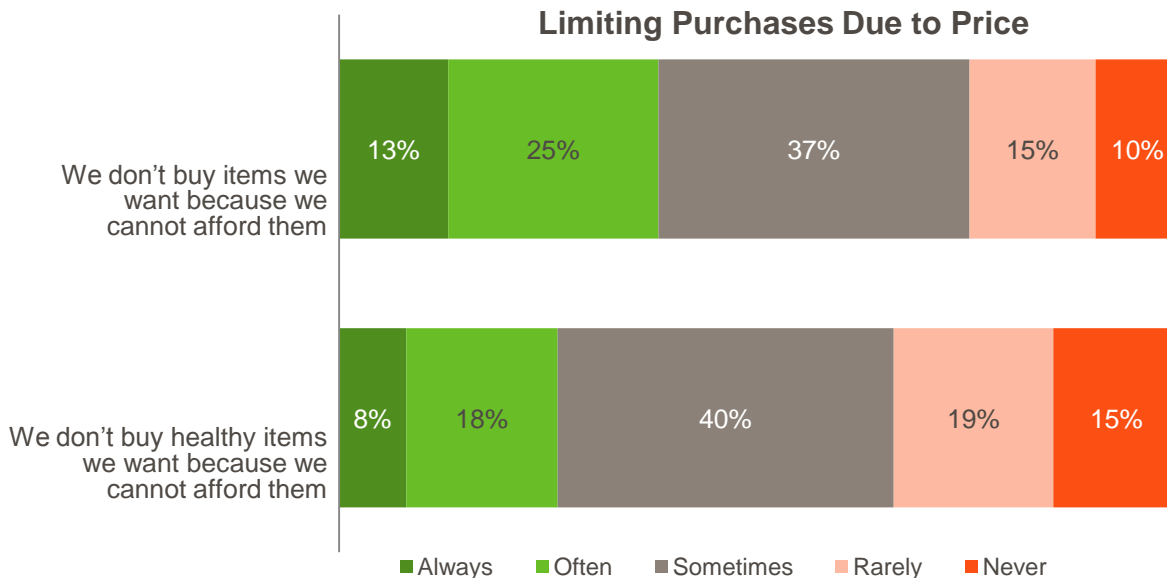


- At least 60% of families are satisfied with their grocery shopping options when it comes to providing healthy food and drink (e.g. quality, variety, and ability to keep it stocked).
- In comparison, satisfaction about price is cut in half to only 30% and approximately 1 in 5 families say they are extremely dissatisfied with price.
- Access does not appear to be an issue for a strong majority. 73% say they are satisfied with their grocery options' ease of access. Even 69% of rural respondents say they are satisfied on this attribute. Still, this number is statistically lower than urban families, 77% of which say they are satisfied.
- Families with low food security and those who have been directly affected by the recession are more likely to say they are dissatisfied with many of the listed attributes.
- Families that eat healthy, balanced and/or made from scratch dinners most days of the week are more likely to be satisfied with the listed attributes.

Please tell me how satisfied you are with your current grocery shopping options when it comes to each of the following. Please rate your answer using any number on a scale from zero (0) to ten (10) where 0 is "extremely dissatisfied" and 10 is "extremely satisfied." How satisfied are you with your current grocery shopping options'...

Some families refrain from purchasing certain items (both regular and healthy groceries) because of price

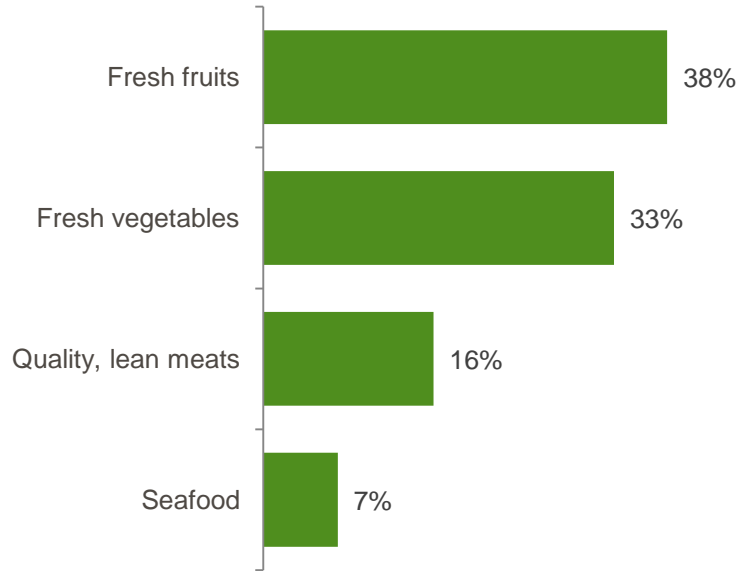
- 26% of families skip healthy purchases because they feel they cannot afford them.
- As food security decreases, likelihood to forego healthy purchases increases.
- Families who have been directly affected by the recession, either because they have lost income or began participating in food assistance programs, are also more likely to skip healthy purchases than those who have not experienced these consequences.



When shopping for groceries how often do you do each of the following activities?
Please tell me whether you do each of the following never, rarely, sometimes, often or always.

Fresh produce, lean meats and seafood are often passed over when money is tight

Healthy Groceries Not Purchased Because of Price*
(n=988)



*Answers that are lower than 5% are not included

- Qualitatively, people mention that several of the items listed at the left have increased in price recently.

“Meat has gotten outrageous. Fruits and vegetables have gone way up as well.”

“Fruit. The price has gotten higher so if I have to choose between a meal and fruit I will go with the meal.”

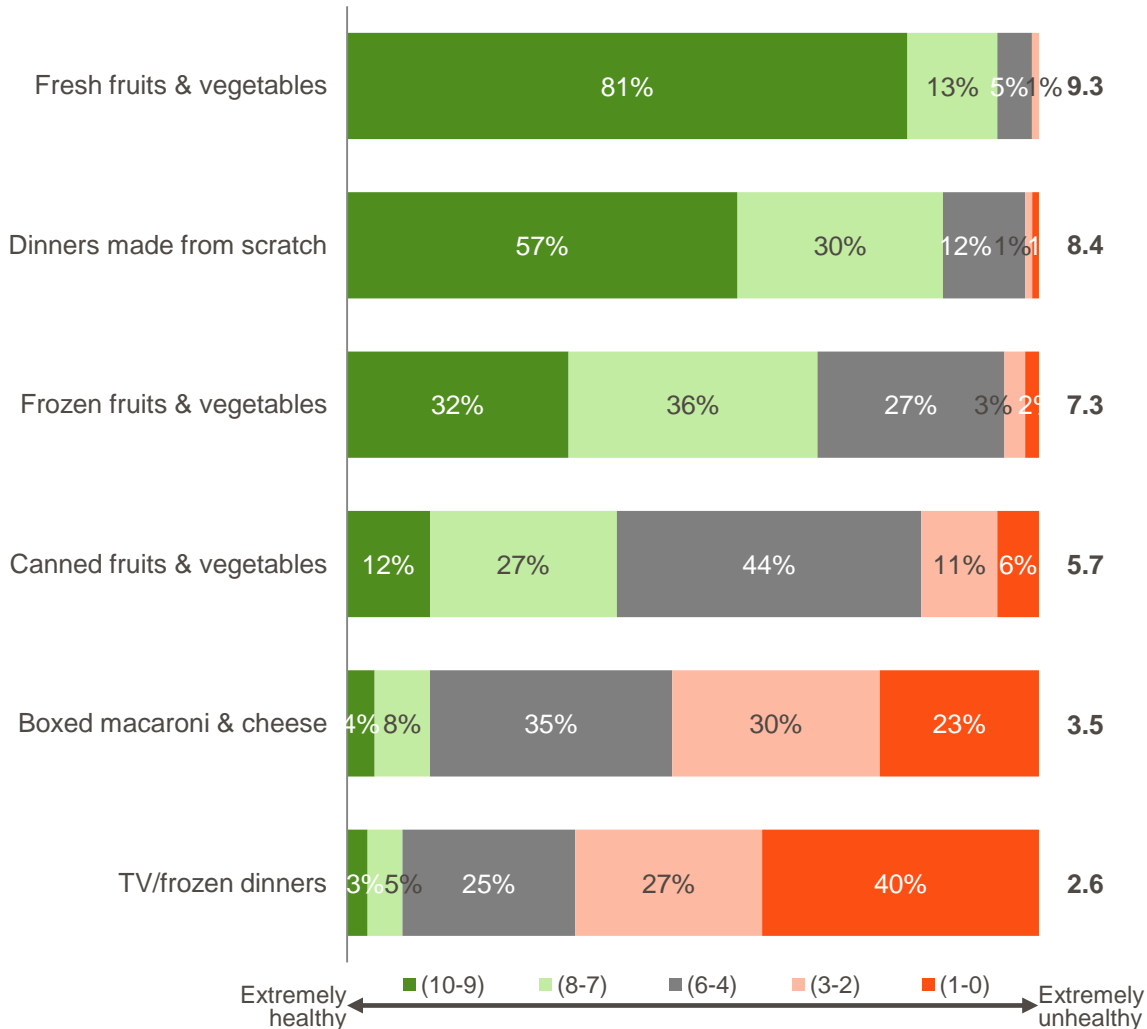
“We use an EBT card, so I use all of it at the beginning of the month and cannot afford to have fresh fruits and vegetables all month.”

“[I’d like to buy] healthier snacks for my husband and brother to take to work.”

“[I sometimes don’t buy] some good lean cuts of meat. Sometimes I have to make substitutions to cut costs.”

Families may not understand the nutritional similarities between fresh and frozen produce

Perceived Healthiness of Common Grocery Items MEAN

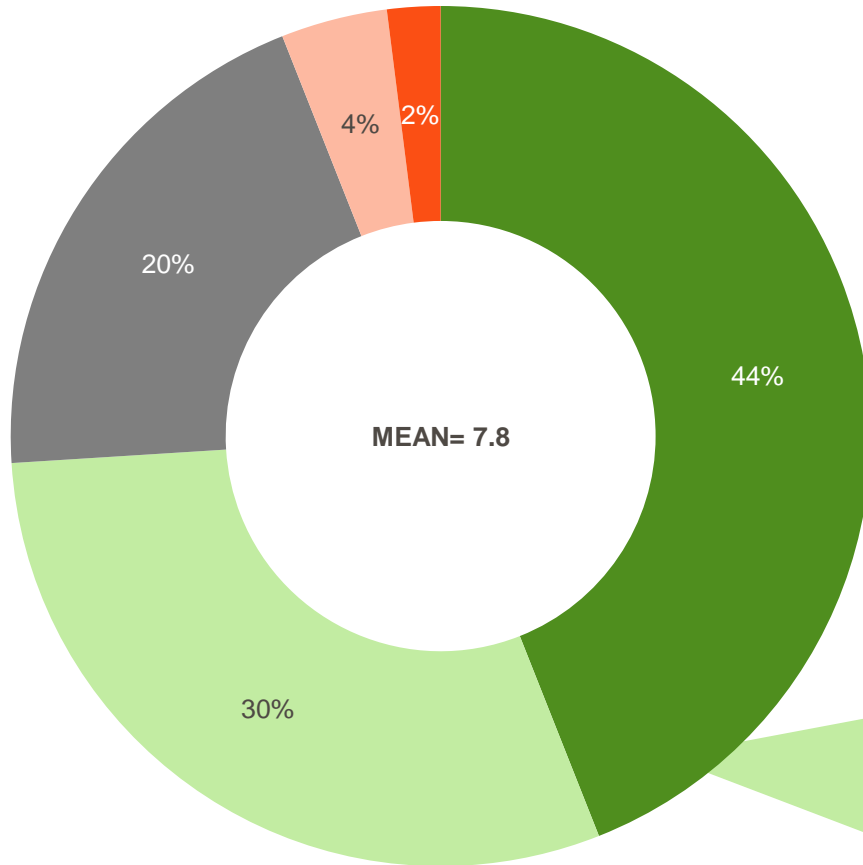


- While parents clearly understand the nutritional value of fresh produce (81% say fresh fruits and vegetables are extremely healthy), the data suggest there may be a lack of understanding for the health benefits of frozen produce as well. Dramatically fewer parents (32%) rated frozen fruits and vegetables as extremely healthy.
- Also of note, the nutritional value of canned fruits and vegetables appears to be unknown or ignored by a plurality of families. 44% rated this item as “neutral.”

In general, how healthy do you believe each of the following foods to be? Please rate your answer using any number on a scale from zero (0) to ten (10) where 0 is “extremely unhealthy” and 10 is “extremely healthy.”

3 in 4 families agree that cooking healthy meals is an attainable goal

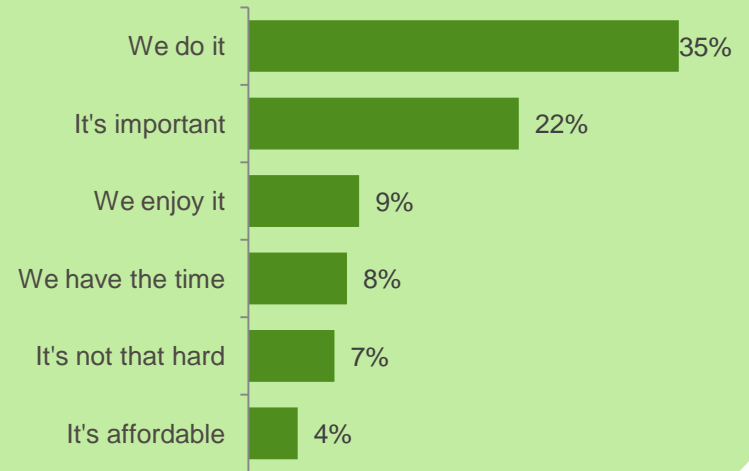
Cooking Healthy Meals is Realistic for My Family



■ Completely Agree (10-9) ■ (8-7) ■ (6-4) ■ (3-2) ■ Completely Disagree (1-0)

- Surveyed families behaviors supports their agreement that cooking healthy meals is realistic. Only 5% of families say they don't make dinner from scratch in a typical week and only 3% say they don't eat a healthy meal at home in a typical week.

Why is it realistic? (n=1119)



I am going to read a statement and would like for you to tell me how much you agree or disagree with this statement. Please rate your answer using any number on a scale from zero (0) to ten (10) where 0 is "completely disagree" and 10 is "completely agree."

Why did you choose this rating?

Open ended responses reveal that many families want to cook healthy meals

"I make it a reality."

"So my kids can grow up healthy."

"Even though our family is on the poverty line, we make an attempt to eat healthy. We can control what goes into our food and my kids get full with healthy foods."

"Healthy foods are way out of my budget."

"I try my best to do it."

"I'd like to but sometimes I'm not able to."

"I like cooking from scratch and food tastes better."

"Because we do it on a daily basis. I just wish it were cheaper."

"I believe in eating healthy and our family tree has diabetes...so I try to stay healthy."

"We do not cook healthy foods as much as we should."

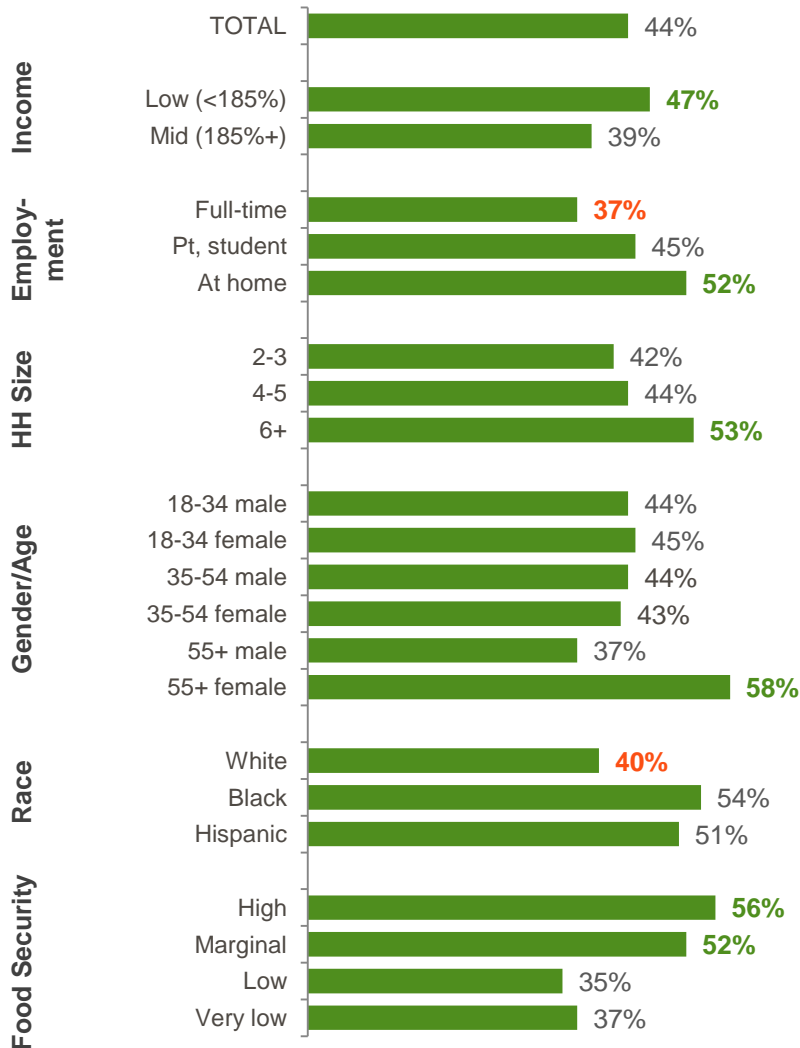
"It's difficult because we can't afford it and don't know how to prepare them."

"I don't have time to stand over the stove all day."

Families with certain demographics are more likely to completely agree that cooking healthy meals is realistic



Cooking Healthy Meals is Realistic
% Completely Agree (9-10)



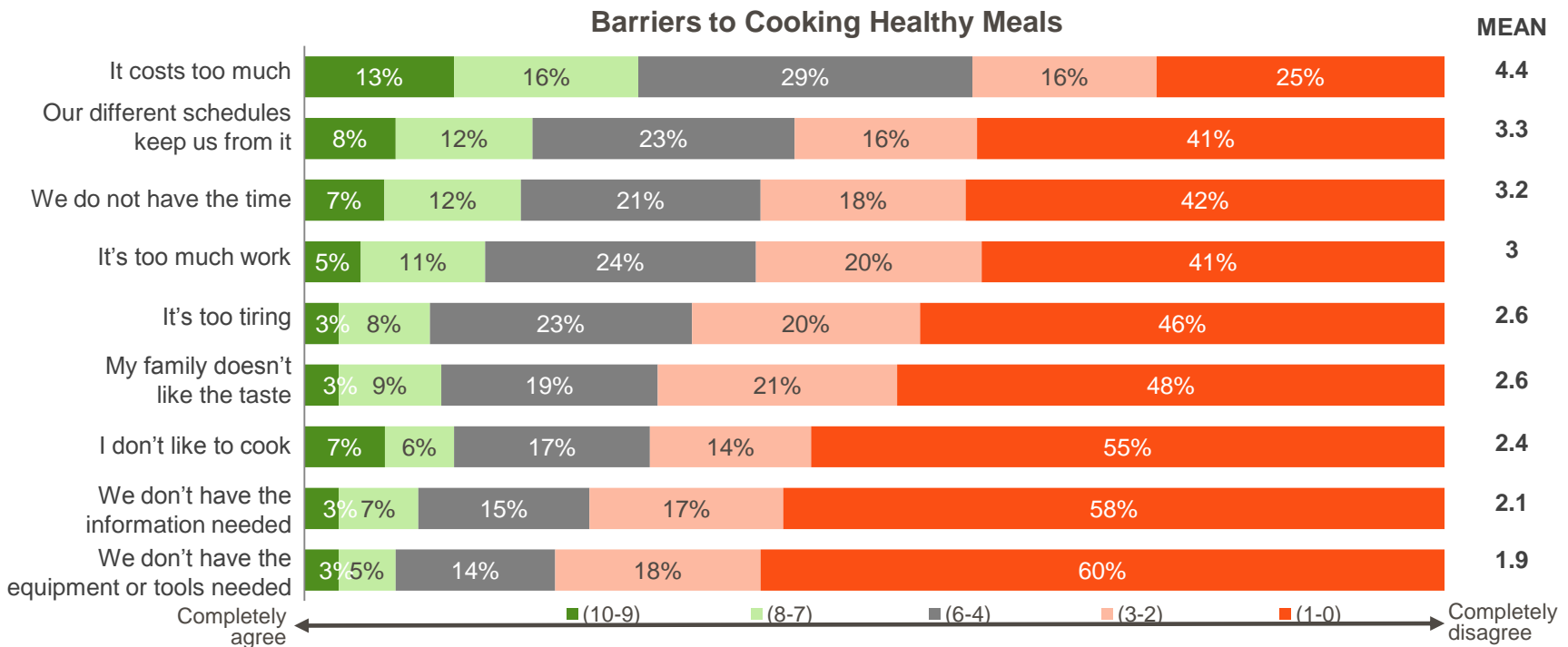
The chart at left highlights those demographic categories where statistically significant differences were found:

- The data shows that those with more time are cooking more healthy meals, so it is not surprising that significantly more of this same demographic of **homemakers, unemployed, disabled, etc.** report that they completely agree cooking healthy meals is a realistic goal. The same is true for those in **larger households (6+)** and families with **high or marginal food security**.
- The data also show that **older females (55+)** are more likely and **Caucasians** are less likely to say they completely agree.

Thinking about a typical week, how many times does your family do the following at home ...?

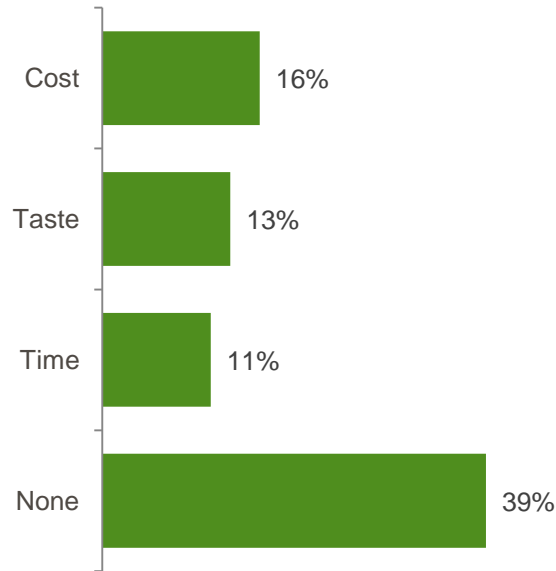
Most families don't agree that the assessed barriers keep them from cooking healthy meals

- A majority of families disagree with almost all listed barriers, especially enjoyment, information and tools as a majority completely disagree that these are barriers to cooking healthy meals.
- Some do perceive price, conflicting schedules and time as barriers, though, as these are the most commonly agreed upon issues.
- Families where the food decision maker does not work (i.e. retired, homemaker, etc.) and families who are food secure, are more likely to disagree that these barriers keep them from cooking healthy meals.
- For most obstacles, families that do not commonly eat healthy, balanced or made from scratch meals are significantly more likely to agree that these challenges keep them from cooking healthy meals.



Open end responses reference the aforementioned common barriers of cost and time

Other Challenges to Cooking Healthy Meals*



*Answers that are lower than 5% are not included

- Interestingly, while most families (69%) disagree that they do not like the taste of healthy foods, some mention picky eaters and differing palates as an additional barrier.

“Sometimes healthy stuff is expensive and I don’t have it on hand. Also it goes bad faster and is more perishable.”

“Variety [is a challenge]. So, that I do not cook the same meals over and over again.”

“Budget [is the challenge]. By the time you pay utilities and insurance, it doesn’t leave much left.”

“Fixing something that everybody likes to eat [is a challenge]. Everybody likes something different.”

“Sometimes time and hectic schedules get in the way.”

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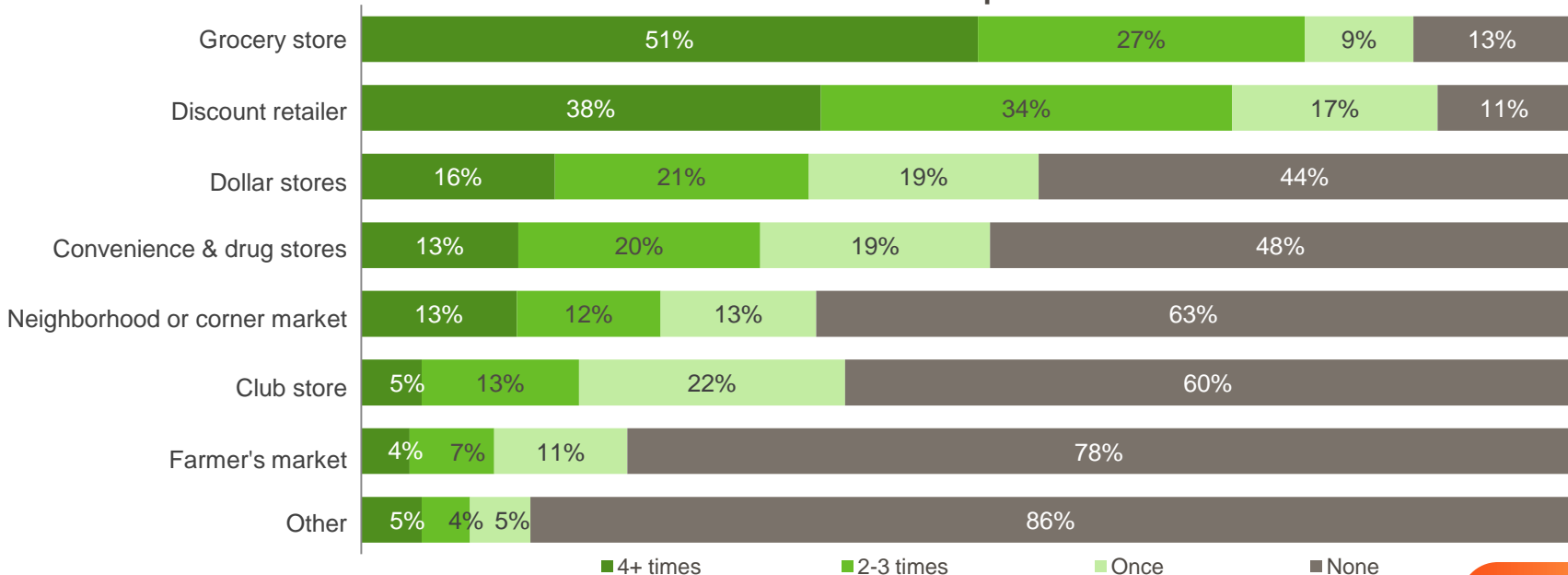
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GROCERY SHOPPING, PLANNING & BUDGETING

Discount retailers and traditional grocery stores are the most commonly used grocery options

- At least 87% of respondents have shopped at a discount retailer (such as Super Wal-Mart or Target) or a traditional grocery store in the past month. These same stores are also the most frequented with at least one-third visiting 4 or more times the month.
- About 1 in 2 respondents shopped at a convenience store, drug store and dollar store for groceries in the past month.
- 40% report shopping at a club store (such as a Sam's Club or Costco) in the past month, most commonly visiting only once. Significantly more WIC participants shopped at Club stores in the past month than those participating in other food assistance programs. 54% said they did not shop at a club store in the past month compared to 64% of SNAP participants and 61% of free/reduced school meal participants.

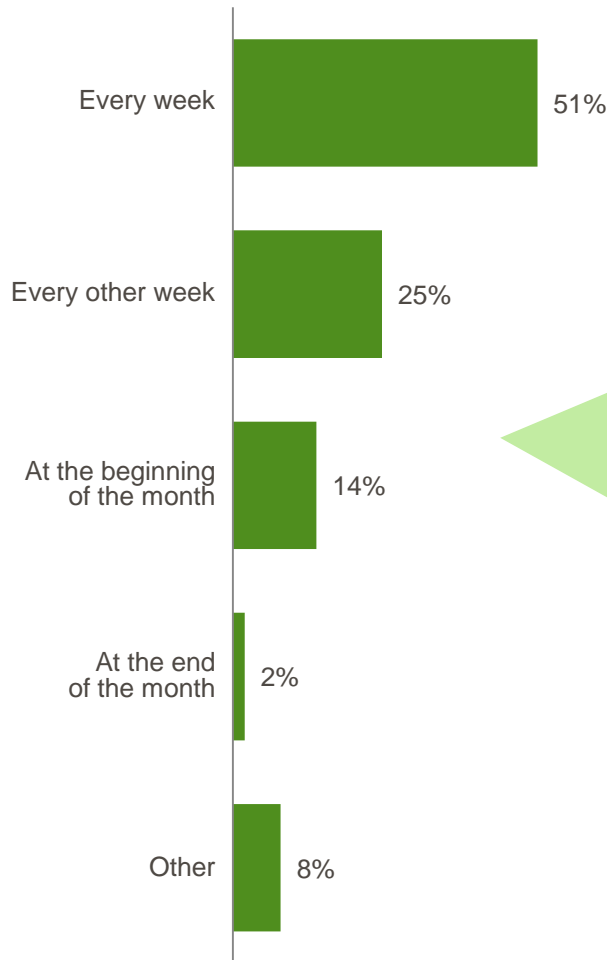
Where Families Shop for Groceries



How often did you shop at each of the following locations for groceries this past month? By groceries, I specifically mean food and drinks, not household products like toilet paper or dish detergent. As I read each location, please tell me if you shopped there once, 2-3 times, 4-5 times, or 6 or more times this month. If you did not shop at the location this past month, please say so.

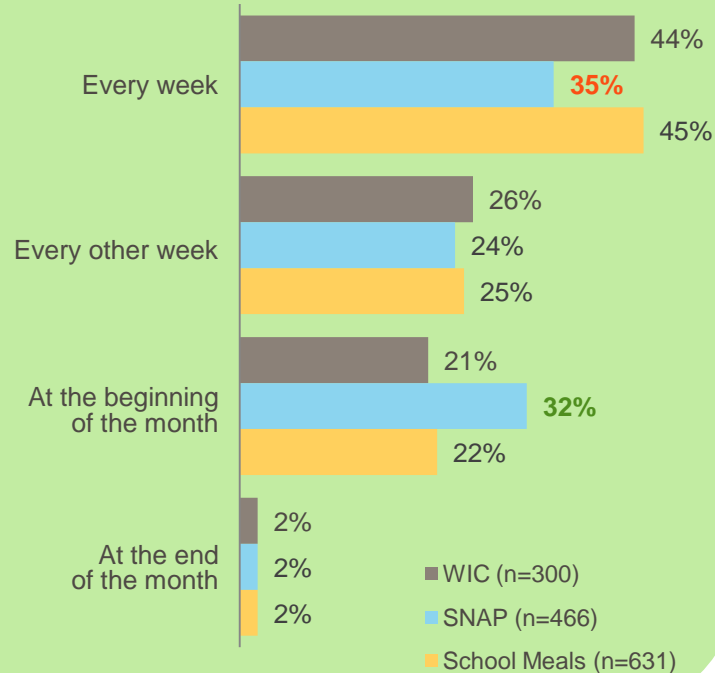
About half of respondents report primarily shopping for groceries on a weekly basis

When Families Primarily Shop for Groceries



- Just 16 percent say they shop primarily at the beginning (14%) or end (2%) of the month.
- SNAP participants are more twice as likely to shop at the beginning of the month, presumably once they receive their assistance dollars.

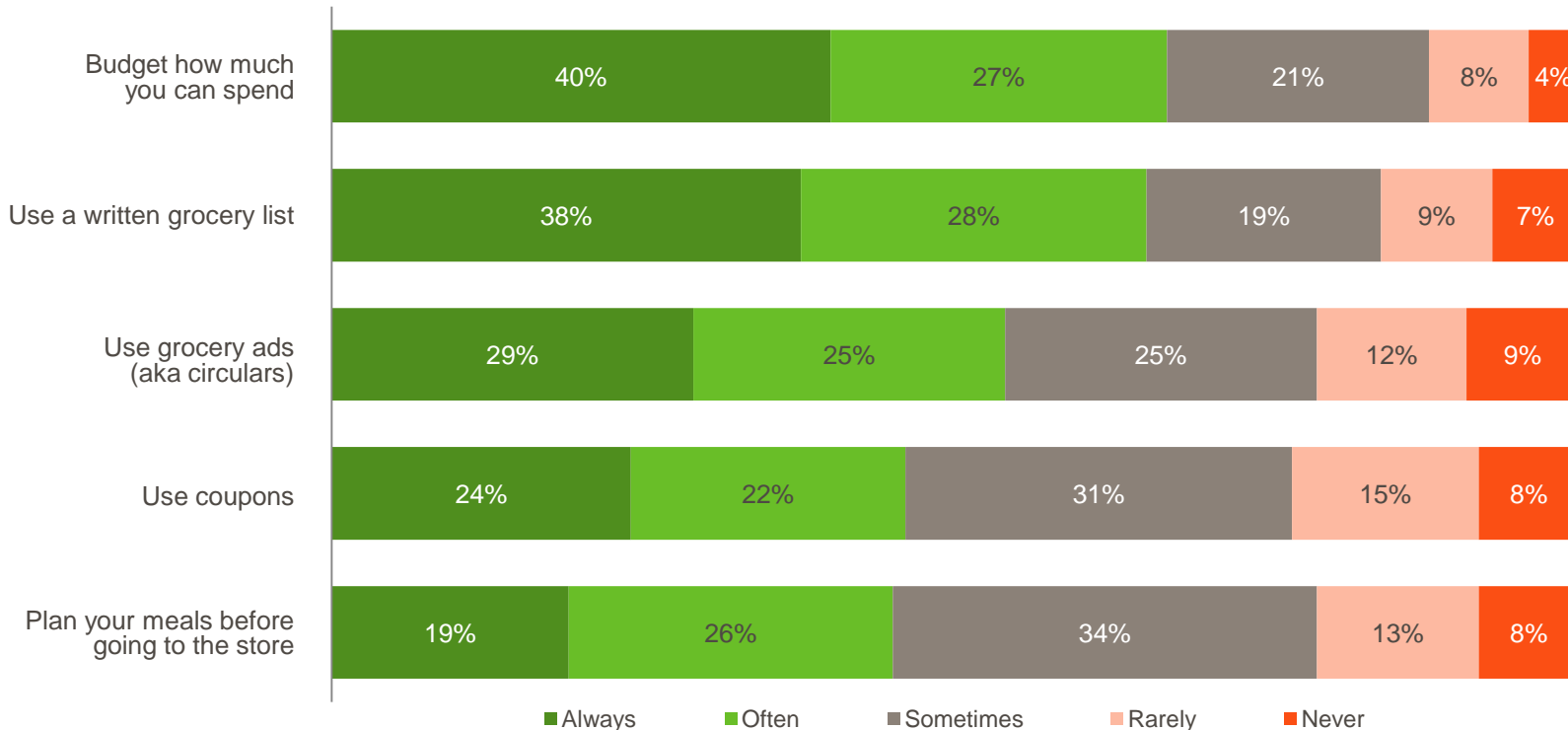
Comparing Food Assistance Programs



Families report commonly budgeting how much they can spend and using a written grocery list

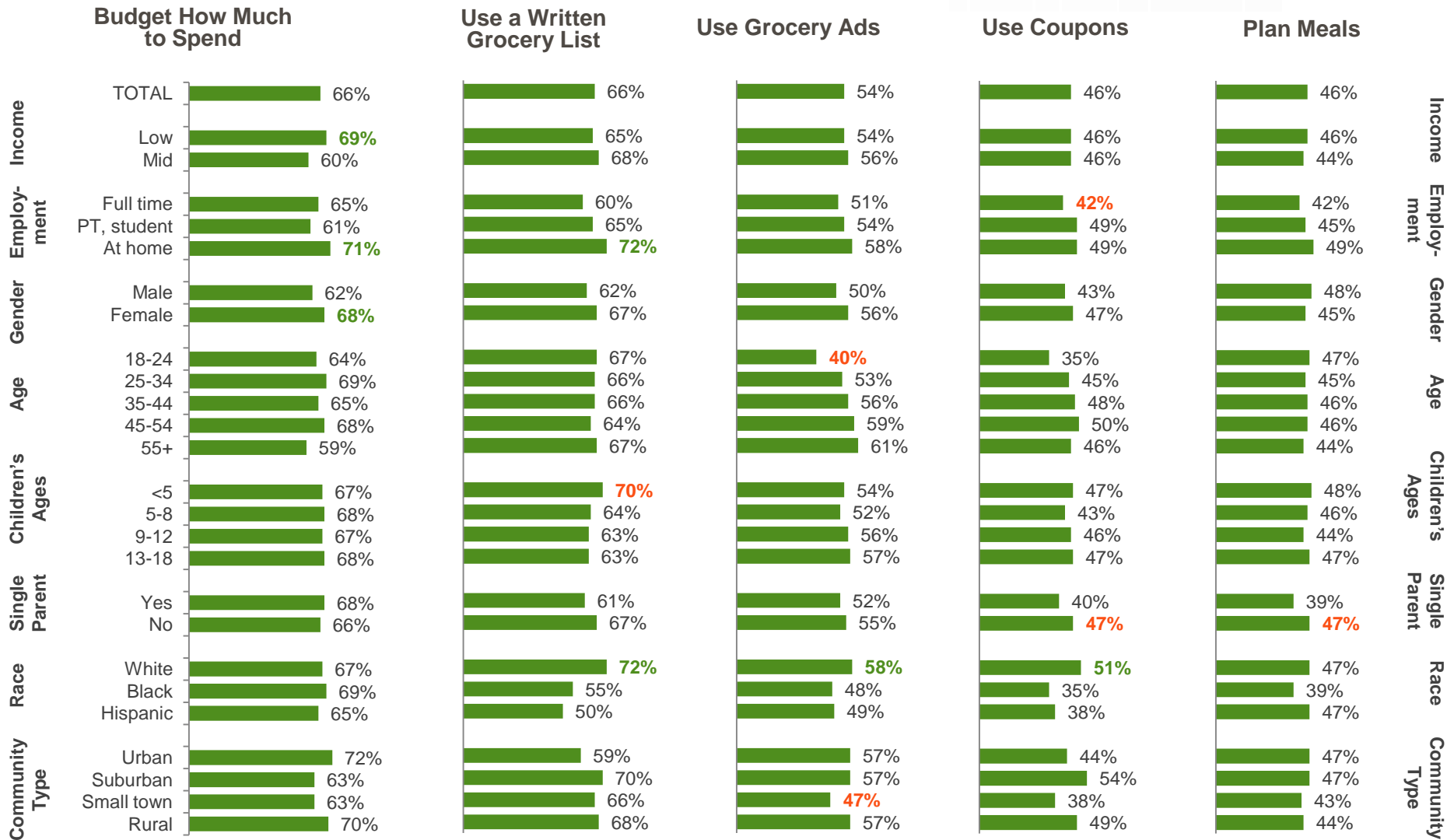
- About 2 in 3 respondents report doing these activities often or always when shopping for groceries.
- Families are more commonly using grocery circulars (54%) than coupons (46%).
- Just over 1 in 5 families rarely or never use circulars, coupons or plan their meals in advance.

Grocery Planning & Budgeting Behaviors



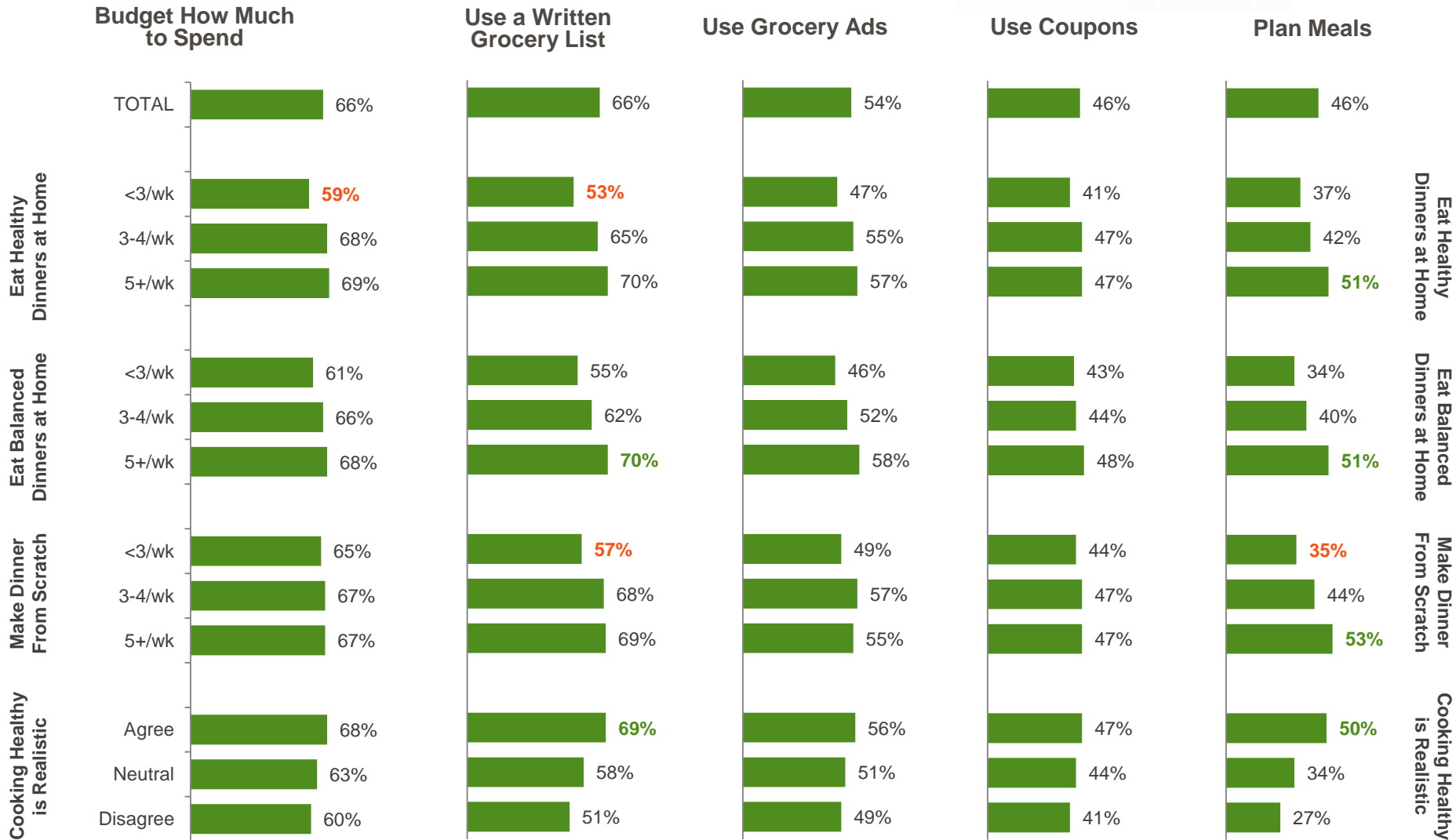
When shopping for groceries how often do you do each of the following activities? Please tell me whether you do each of the following never, rarely, sometimes, often or always.

% who always or often participate in grocery planning and budgeting by demographics



When shopping for groceries how often do you do each of the following activities?
Please tell me whether you do each of the following never, rarely, sometimes, often or always.

% who always or often participate in grocery planning and budgeting by behaviors and perceptions

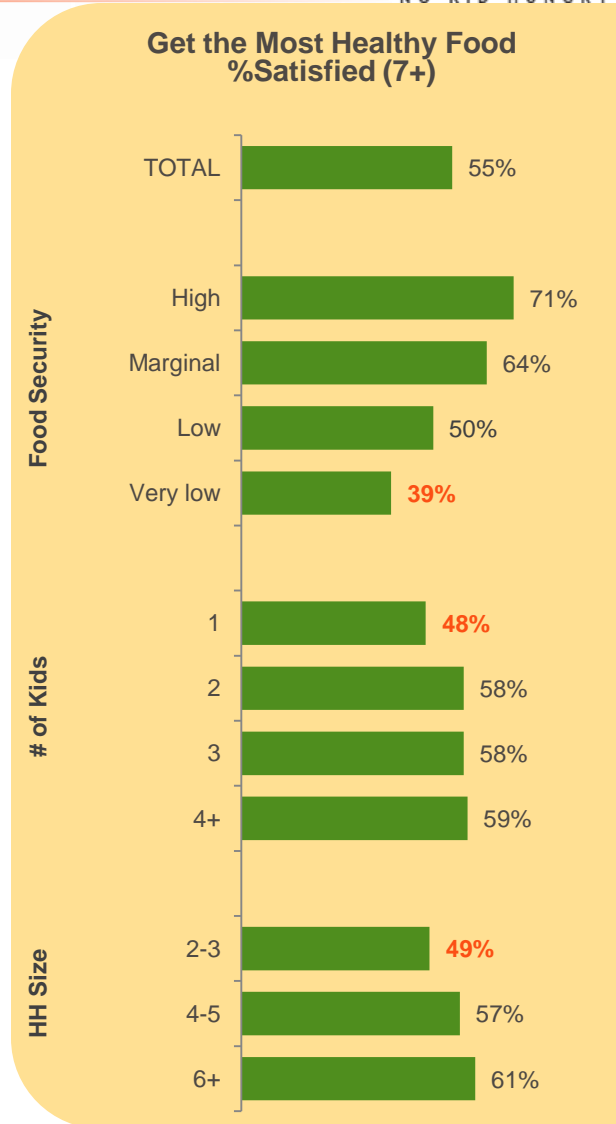
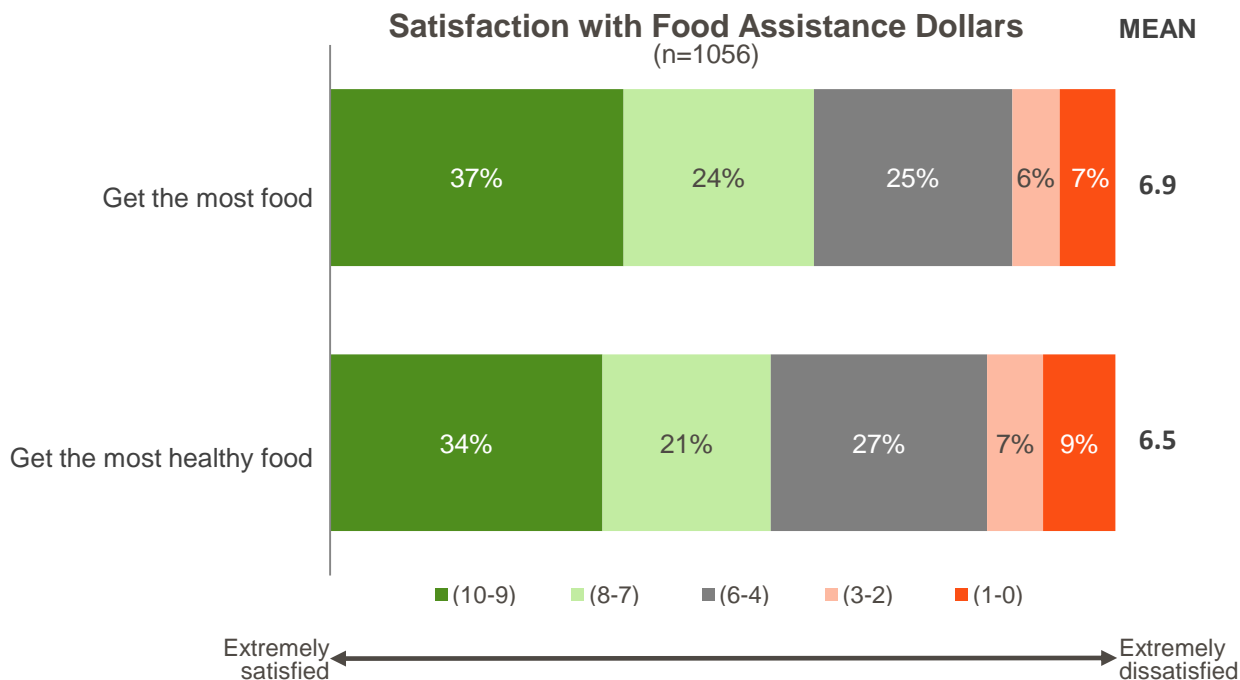


When shopping for groceries how often do you do each of the following activities?
Please tell me whether you do each of the following never, rarely, sometimes, often or always.

A majority of families who have used WIC and SNAP are satisfied with their ability to get the most healthy food from these resources



- About 1 in 4 families say they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with maximizing their food assistance dollars.
- As food security, household size and number of children increases, so does satisfaction with effectively budgeting assistance dollars for healthy foods.



Please tell me how satisfied you are/were with your family's ability to do each of the following. Please rate your answer using any number on a scale from zero to ten where 0 is 'extremely dissatisfied' and 10 is 'extremely satisfied.'

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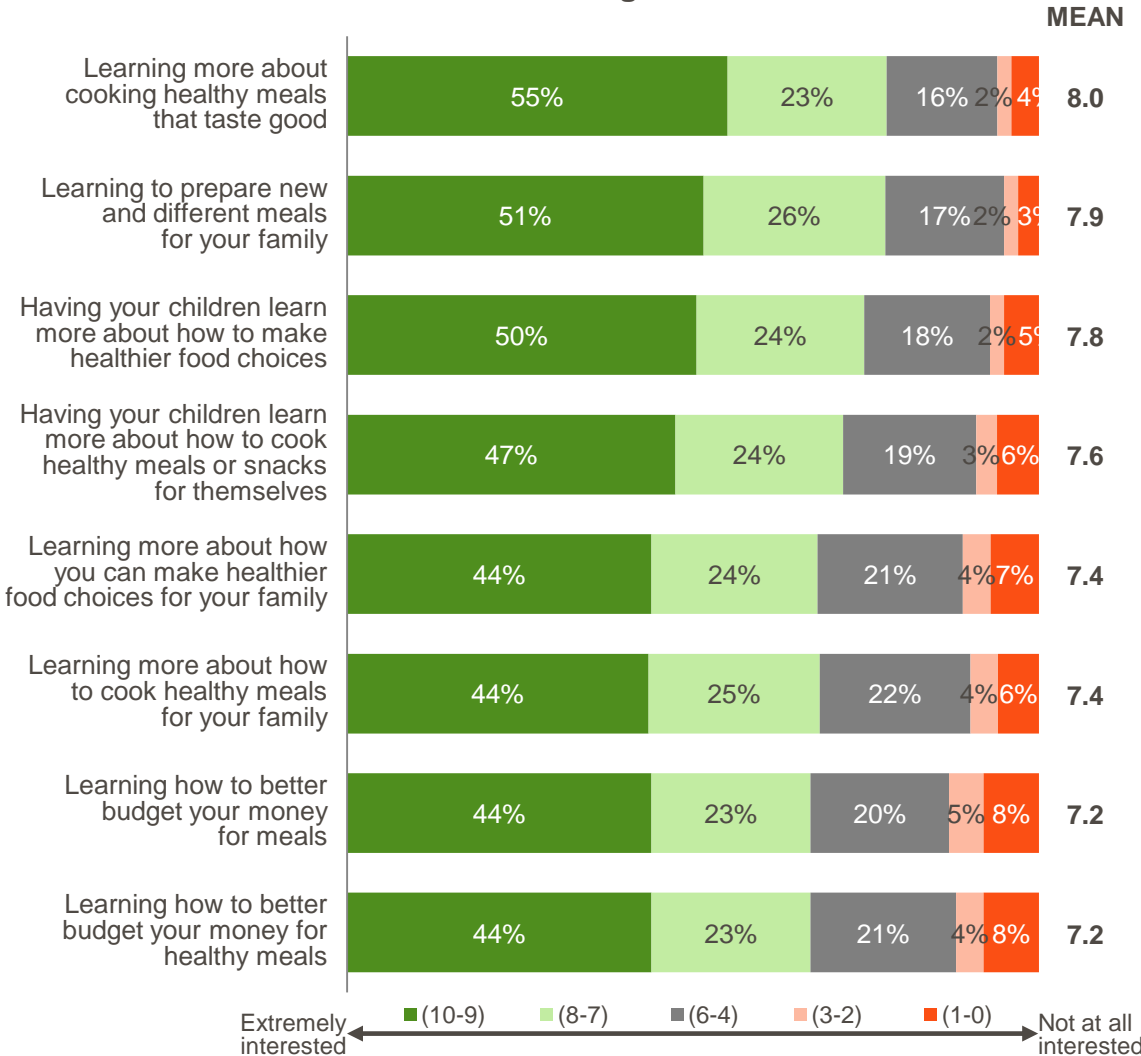
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POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

About 1 in 2 families say they are extremely interested in learning more about cooking healthy meals



Interest in Learning More about Healthy Cooking and Choices



- There is clearly strong interest in learning more about cooking healthy meals. At least 2/3 of parents say they are interested in each of the activities presented.
- Interestingly, while there is a strong disagreement that taste is a barrier to eating healthy for their families (48% completely disagree with this statement), learning how to cook healthy meals that taste good is the activity in which parents are most interested (55% say they are extremely interested).
- Low income families in particular are extremely interested in almost all activities, the exception being learning more about cooking healthy meals that taste good which appears to be equally appealing despite income demographics.

Please tell me how interested you are in each of the following activities. Please rate your answer using any number on a scale from zero (0) to ten (10) where 0 is "not at all interested" and 10 is "extremely interested."

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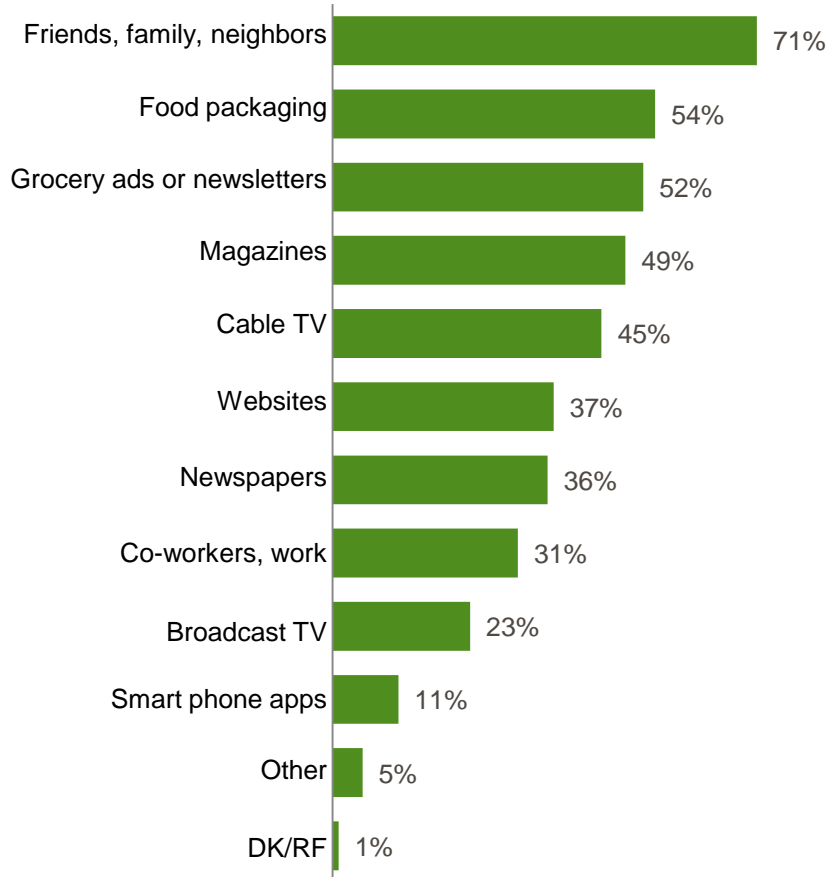
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APPENDIX

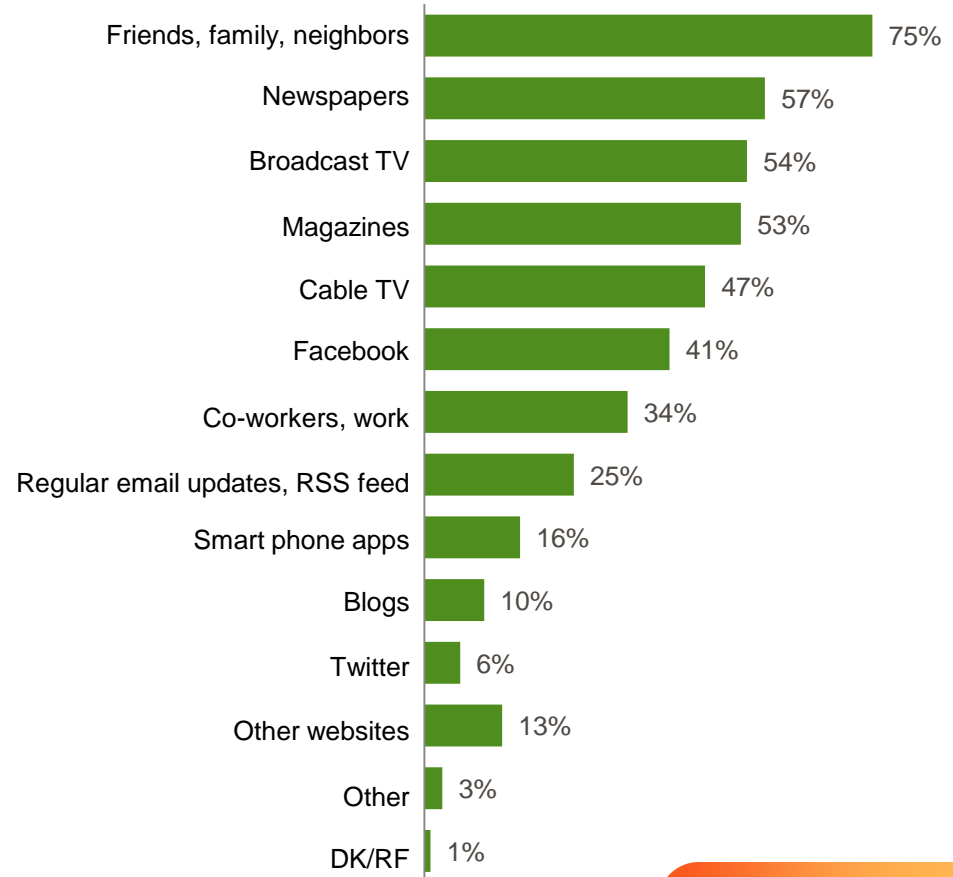
Friends, family and neighbors are the primary information sources for both general news and shopping and cooking



Information Sources for Shopping and Cooking
(n=750)

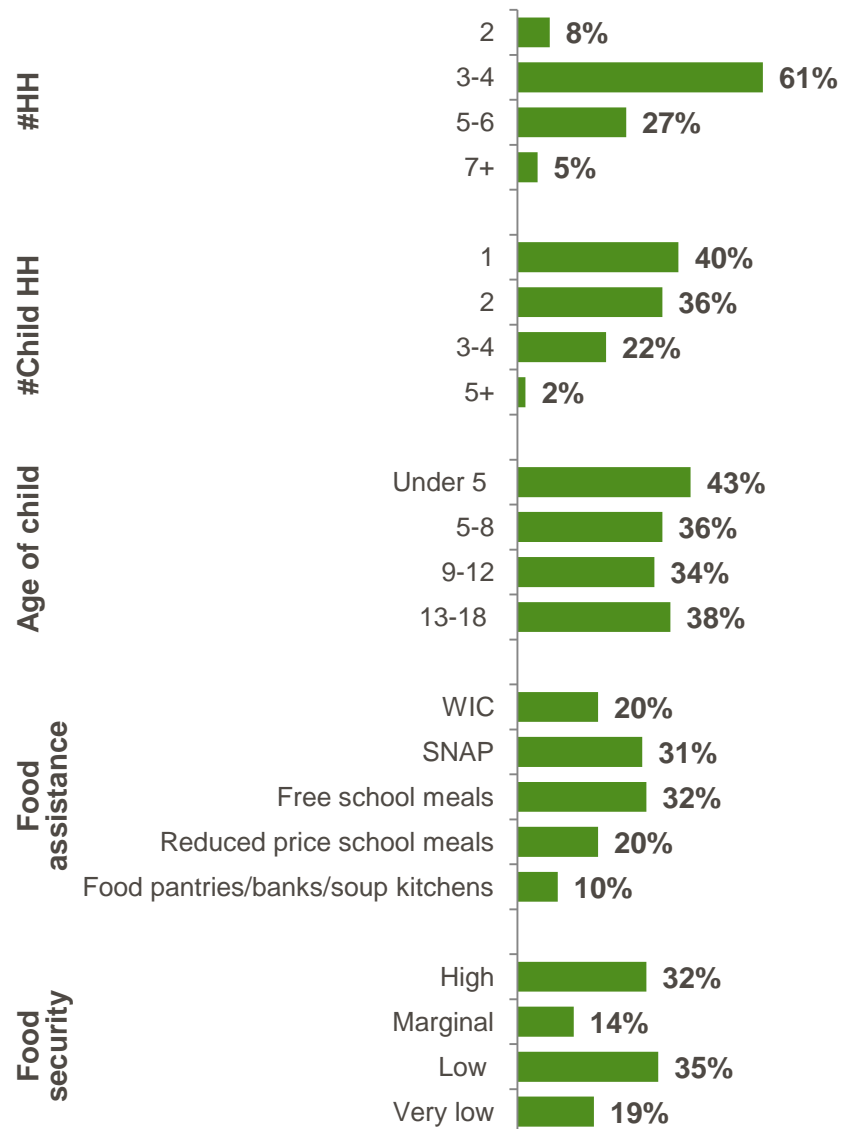
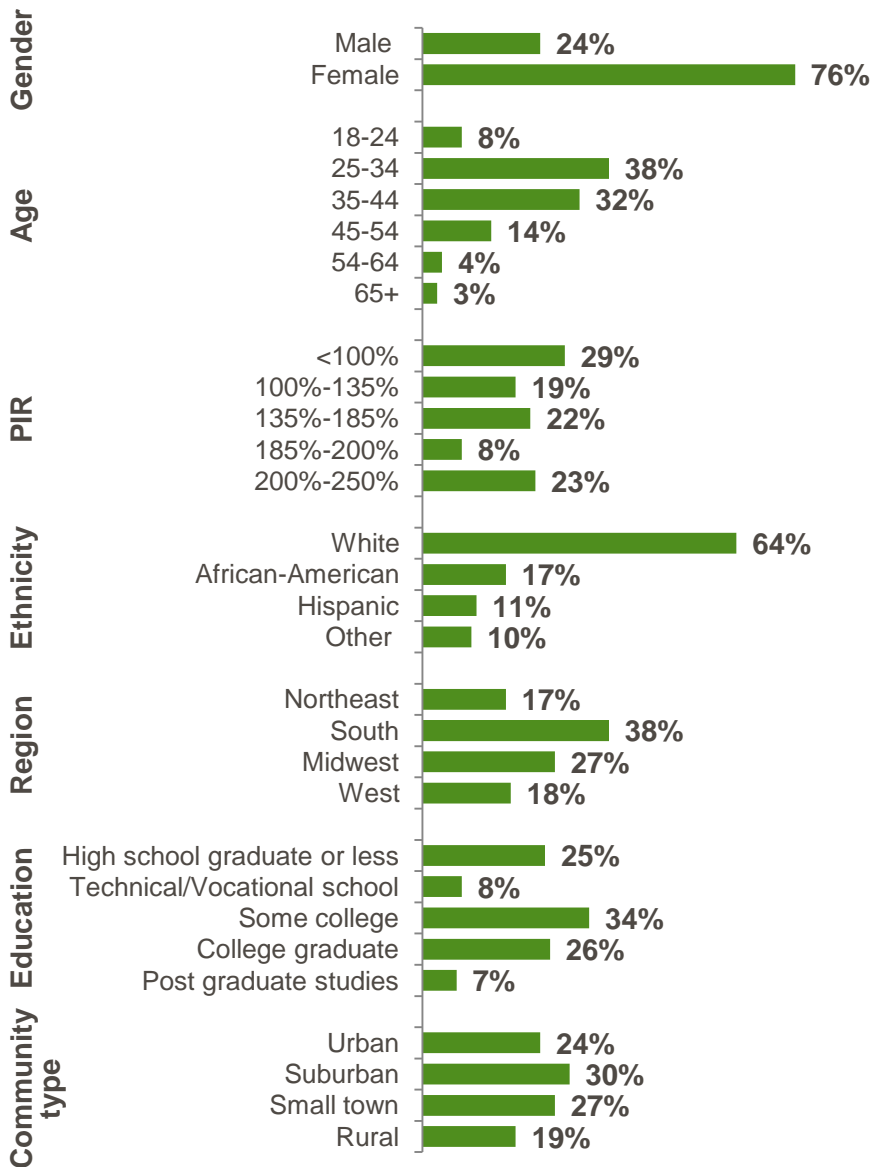


General Information Sources
(n=750)



*Do you use any of the following for news and information on shopping and cooking?
In general, do you use any of the following for news and information?*

Demographics



Topline Results from Exploratory Focus Groups



METHODOLOGY

- A total of 17 low-income parents participated in two focus group sessions in Baltimore, Maryland on November 1, 2011. Participants were screened to ensure they had at least one child under the age of 18 living in their home, were the primary food decision makers for the household, and had a household income that fell under 250% of the 2010 poverty threshold set forth by the U.S. Census Bureau. Focus group participants represented a mix of age, income and ethnicity.
- The sessions followed a discussion guide developed in concert with Share Our Strength. In addition, participants were asked to complete a daily journal about their food decisions prior to the focus groups. Each session lasted approximately 90 minutes.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Parents want to cook healthy meals for their families.** Most parents report that cooking healthy foods is important for their family. These parents want their children to be healthy, particularly those participants who currently have health issues such as diabetes or high cholesterol.
 - *“I don’t want my grandson to have the same health problems as me.”*
 - *“I give my daughter fish because they say it’s brain food and I want her to be smart.”*
- **Some have made healthy cooking a major priority, but only a minority actually practices cooking healthy meals.** Meals for most families are easy, quick, filling, inexpensive, and often consist of boxed or processed foods. Most parents think eating healthy is a realistic goal for their families, but some feel overwhelmed by their economic circumstances.

Topline Results from Exploratory Focus Groups



KEY FINDINGS (continued)

- **Most parents recognize which foods are healthy.** Participants buy a wide range of foods, including a wide range of items they consider healthy such as fruits, vegetables, milk, and chicken. Many participants' gauge for healthy appears to be more focused on caloric intake than nutritional value. While some limit their perception of healthy foods to fresh and organic produce which they are unable to afford, many others recognize the fact that frozen vegetables are also healthy and many resort to canned goods (beans, vegetables) to make ends meet and still eat "healthy" food.
- **Cost and time are the biggest obstacles to eating healthy for low-income families.** Not surprisingly, lack of money and time are major barriers.
 - Parents often forego purchasing healthier items when money is especially tight. Items like fruit and yogurt are sacrificed for basic foods like eggs, bread, milk and chicken. Interestingly, many of the "junk food" items, such as potato chips, frozen pizzas and desserts are also eliminated.
 - Many parents go grocery shopping at discount club stores once a month in order to save money and time. A monthly receipt of food stamps is also a heavily contributing factor to this type of shopping behavior. Nevertheless, this routine makes it difficult to buy fresh produce since families believe it will spoil and go to waste.
 - Time deficits mean parents are more likely to prepare easy to cook meals that can be unhealthy. Participants' journals reveal that meals like hamburgers or hot dogs and frozen french fries, frozen pizza or "TV dinners", or spaghetti with jar sauce and frozen garlic bread are commonly eaten at home. Meals that involve more preparation are typically prepared on Sundays and special occasions.

Topline Results from Exploratory Focus Groups



KEY FINDINGS (continued)

- **Access and taste are also obstacles for some, but in comparison to cost and time, these are minor hindrances to most.**
 - Access to groceries was only an issue for one respondent, who was unable to drive. For this mom, grocery shopping is a major task which is a huge obstacle to healthy eating. Still, most parents have access to several grocery stores.
 - Most parents report that eating healthy food isn't an issue of taste as their children enjoy the taste of healthy foods, particularly fruit. Some parents report having picky eaters in their households, but most say they do not allow their children's taste preferences to impact whether or not healthy foods are included on the family menu.
- **Families are eating at home because it's too expensive to eat out.** Even eating fast food and takeout does not appear to be common for most of these families. Eating out is generally reserved for Fridays or Saturdays or special occasions. In fact, many feel guilty when eating outside of the home because of the expense.
 - *"We used to eat out a lot but not anymore. It's just too expensive."*
 - *"Sometimes I feel guilty eating out. I could have spent that money on groceries."*
- **Eating as a family is something most would like to do, but many have resigned to the fact that it's just not possible.** Chaotic and differing schedules make it almost impossible for many families to eat together most weeknights. This is especially true for families with teenagers who are more likely to be involved in evening activities outside of the home. There is some hope for the weekend though, as several participants spoke about eating together on Saturdays and Sundays, particularly Sunday when there is more time and energy to prepare a substantial meal.

Topline Results from Exploratory Focus Groups



KEY FINDINGS (continued)

- **Grocery and meal planning comes more easily to some than others.** Parents report mixed behaviors when it comes to preparing lists, using coupons and reading circulars. Participant behaviors ranged widely from not planning at all to reading the circulars and shopping at 3-4 different stores and “extreme couponing” in order to get the best deals.
- **Parents appear to welcome more information on recipes and budgeting.** Participants were eager to trade tips on which stores had the best deals, how they use coupons, and what dinners they prepare that are healthy, easy and inexpensive.
 - Some parents are bored with eating the same things every week. They feel confined to the same meals since they can’t afford to buy new or more interesting ingredients.
 - *“We end up eating the same things every week. It’s almost a full time job to plan our meals on a budget.”*
 - Just as parents want to cook healthy meals for their families, they also want to stay on budget, but it can be difficult.
 - *“I want to use coupons and write a list, but I just can’t seem to do it.”*
 - *“I am always going over budget. My son just eats so much food!”*
 - Currently, parents rely on family, friends, websites and TV for cooking tips and advice.