

# Making Food Better Tracker Survey 2023

Report prepared for The Food Standards Agency

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# Executive summary



# Executive summary

## Key findings at a glance

- A total of 601 interviews were completed between 4<sup>th</sup> September and 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023 using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI). Quotas were set on gender, age, socio-economic group and region.
- Women (25%) have greater knowledge of their recommended daily calorie intake than men (15%) but general awareness is low among all consumers.
- The primary source of nutritional information for consumers is nutritional claims on packaging (32%), however, 41% disregard this information while shopping.
- Traffic light labelling is recognised by the majority (93%) of consumers but only 43% actively use it. The main use of traffic light labelling is to assess sugar, salt, and fat content in products.
- Promotions influence consumer purchasing behaviours, with 48% more likely to buy chocolate confectionery, crisps and snacks if they are on promotion.
- The majority (80%) of consumers would like to see more promotions on fruit and vegetables, yet only 43% say they would purchase them if they were on promotion.
- Consumers struggle with choosing healthier food when eating out, particularly at takeaways (74%), fast-food restaurants (64%), and places of leisure such as cinemas (60%).

# Executive summary

## Key demographic findings

### Gender

- More women (68%) claim to choose healthier foods while shopping and when eating out (29%) compared to men (55% and 21%, respectively).
- Women (48%) are more likely to use traffic light labels than men (37%) and understand their purpose (83% vs 75%).
- More men (32%) are opposed to seeing reformulated foods and smaller portion sizes than women (20%).

### Socio-economic background

- Those from higher socio-economic groups found it easier to choose healthier food in store at supermarkets compared to those from lower socio-economic groups (80% vs 62%).
- Those from higher socio-economic groups show increased awareness (96%), usage (52%), and understanding (89%) of traffic light labelling compared to those from lower socio-economic groups (90%, 34%, and 71% respectively).

### Age

- Those between the ages of 25-54 (51%) are more inclined to use the traffic light system than those aged 18-24 (30%) and over 55 (35%).
- Those under 55 years of age (63%) are more likely to purchase chocolate confectionary, crisps and snacks if they are on promotion compared to those aged 55 and over (25%).

# Background & methodology



# Background and methodology

## Background

This report presents the findings from the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) 2023 Making Food Better (MFB) Tracker Survey in Northern Ireland (NI). The FSA rebranded its Eating Well Choosing Better (EWCB) programme to MFB in 2023, however, the MFB Tracker Survey is regarded as a continuation of the EWCB Tracker Survey.

The survey measures the progress of the FSA's Making Food Better programme in NI through the collection of robust consumer insights and the monitoring of this data over time.

## Methodology

- All surveys were completed using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) across households in NI.
- A total of 601 interviews were completed in 2023.
- To ensure representation of the population of NI, quota sampling was adopted. Quotas on gender, age, socio-economic group and regions were derived from the latest Census 2021 population statistics (Census Office for Northern Ireland, 2021). In 2022 and 2021, quotas were derived from the 2011 Census statistics.
- In 2022 and 2023 data was weighted to the target for each demographic grouping. No weighting was applied in 2021.
- Fieldwork was conducted between 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023 and 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2023.

# Results





# Women have greater knowledge of their recommended daily calorie intake than men



Question K5b. Base: 307 adult females aged 18+ in Northern Ireland



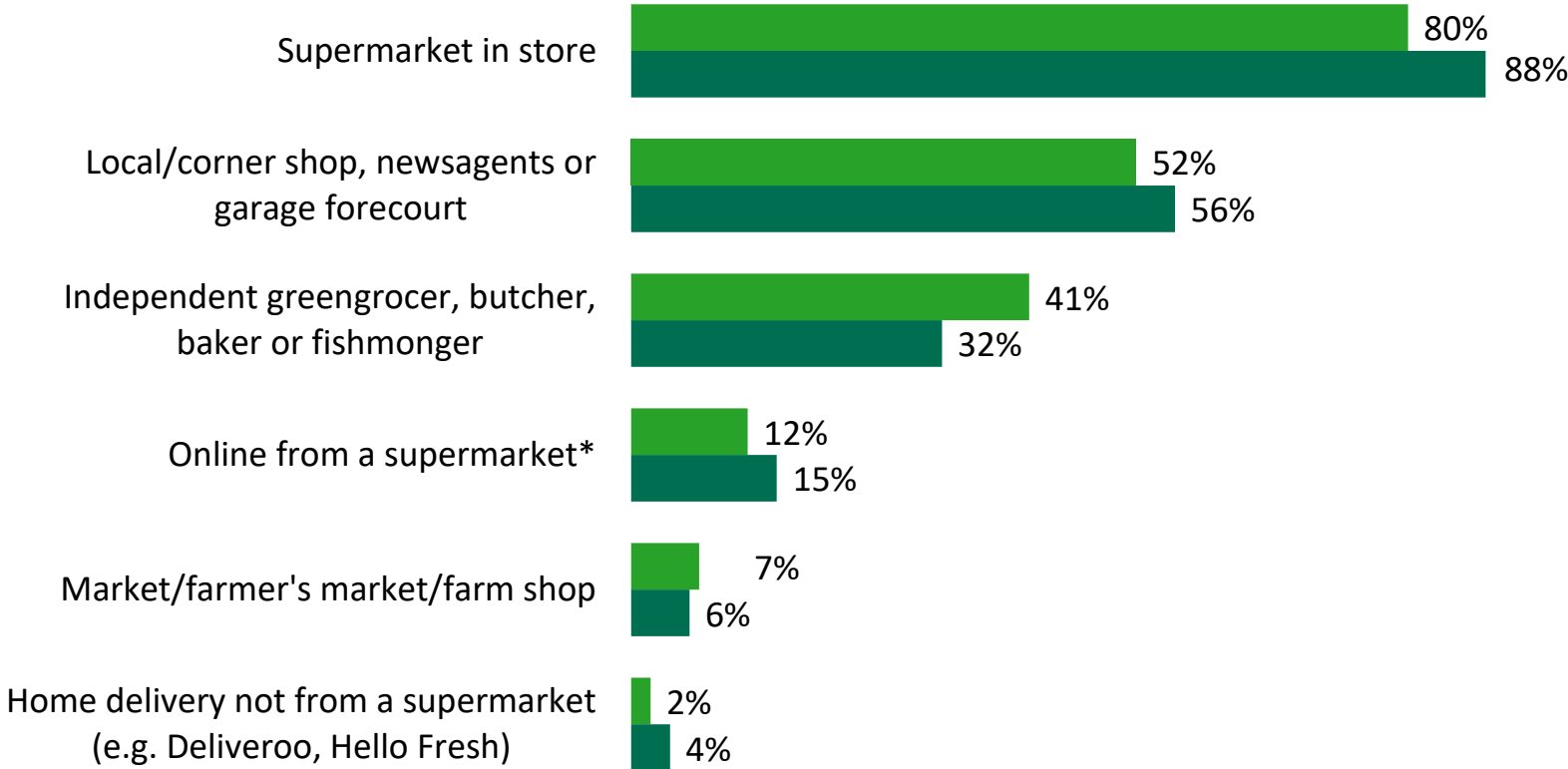
Question K5a. Base: 294 adult males aged 18+ in Northern Ireland

There is scope for greater education on calorie requirements among the NI population as knowledge of the recommended daily calorie intake was poor among females (25%) and males (15%).

# Most consumers shop for food in store at a supermarket

Where consumers shop for food

■ 2023 ■ 2022



Most consumers in NI continue to favour supermarkets as their primary food shopping source (80%), but there has been a shift between 2022 and 2023.

- Supermarket usage fell from 88% to 80%.
- Conversely, independents like greengrocers, butchers and bakers saw an increase, rising from 32% to 41%.

Question B6ii. Base: 2023 (601), 2022 (611) adults in Northern Ireland aged 18+

\*Online from a supermarket includes home delivery and click & collect

# When shopping in store, almost one third look at nutrition claims on the pack to find out nutritional information of products



The leading source of nutritional information for consumers is nutritional claims on pack (32%).

Examples of nutrition claims that consumers may look for on product packaging include 'low sugar', 'low fat', 'high in fibre'.

However, 41% do not look at the nutritional information of products when food shopping in store.

Question B1i.

Base: 586 adults in Northern Ireland aged 18+ who shop in store

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# Although most consumers recognise the traffic light label, less than half use it when shopping for food

In 2023  
**93%**  
recognised the label

In 2022  
**91%**  
recognised the label

In 2021  
**87%**  
recognised the label

In 2023  
**43%**  
used the traffic light label

In 2022  
**45%**  
used the traffic light label

In 2021  
**42%**  
used the traffic light label

Image: Traffic Light Label

Each grilled burger (94g) contains

Energy 924kJ 220 kcal	Fat 13g	Saturates 5.9g	Sugars 0.8g	Salt 0.7g
11%	19%	30%	<1%	12%

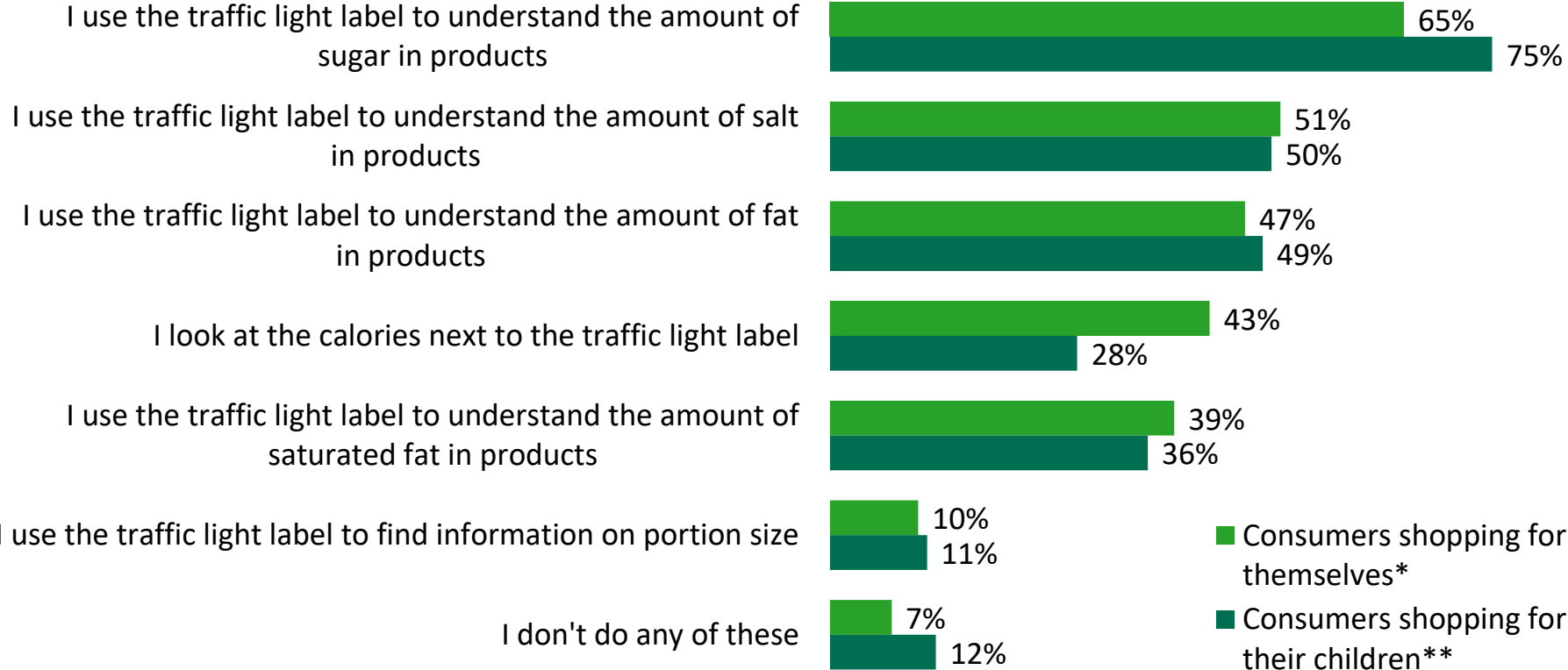
of an adult's reference intake

Typical values (as sold) per 100g: Energy 966kJ / 230kcal

Question B0. Base: 2023 (601), 2022 (611), 2021 (603) adults in Northern Ireland aged 18+

Question B0a. Base: 2023 (557), 2022 (558), 2021 (525) adults in Northern Ireland aged 18+ who recognised the traffic light label

# Consumers have a good understanding of the traffic light label and mostly use it to find out the amount of sugar in foods



The traffic light label mainly helps people understand the amount of:

- sugar;
- salt; and,
- fat

in the food products they buy, whether buying for themselves or their children.

\*Question B5a. Base: 601 adults in Northern Ireland aged 18+  
 \*\*Question B5b. Base: 237 adults in Northern Ireland who have children



# Promotions influence what consumers buy



of consumers agree they are more likely to buy chocolate confectionery, crisps, snacks if they are on promotion

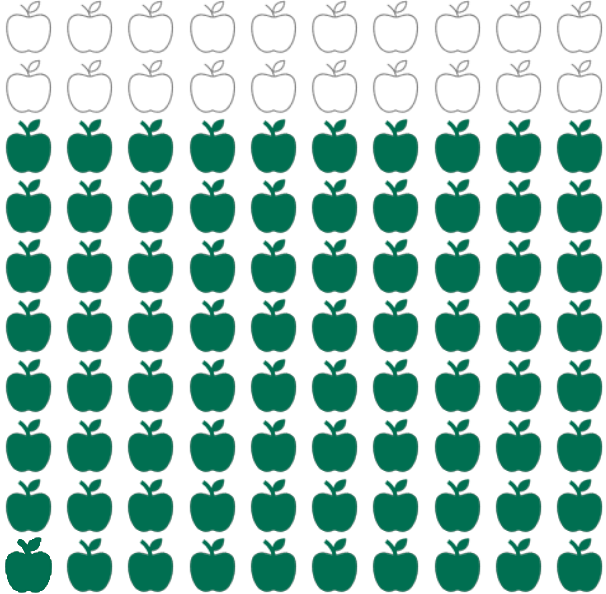
Question B7. Base: 601 adults in Northern Ireland aged 18+

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# Most consumers would like to see more fruit and vegetables on promotion but less than half say they would purchase them if they were on promotion

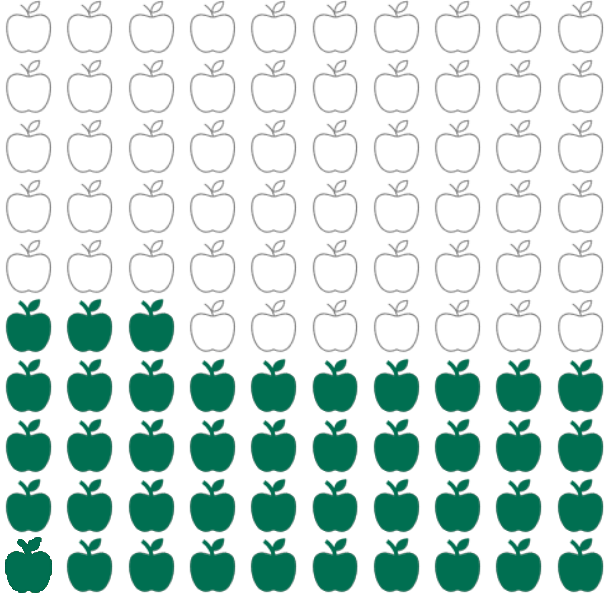
80%

Would like to see more promotions on fruit and vegetables



43%

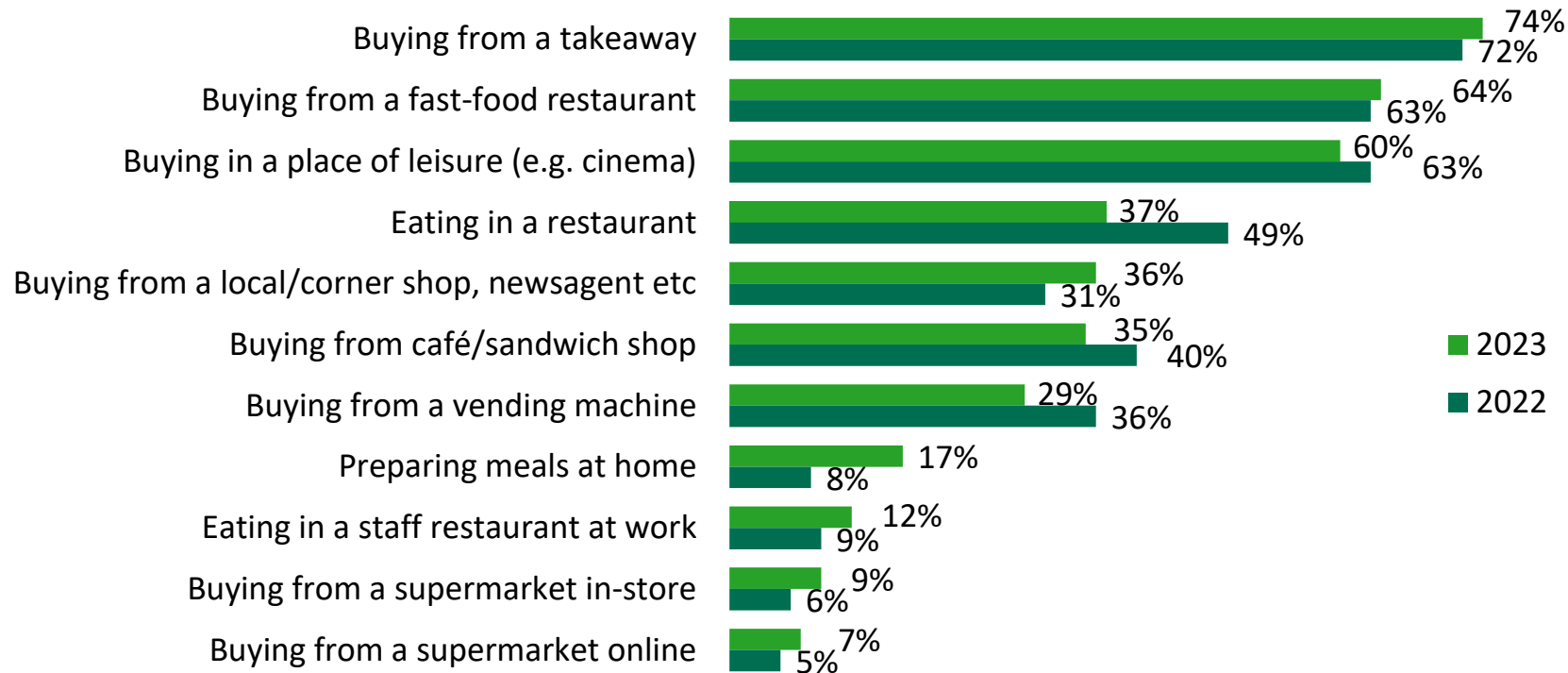
Would be more likely to purchase fruit and vegetables if they were on promotion



Question B7. Base: 601 adults in Northern Ireland aged 18+

# Consumers find it more difficult to choose healthier food when eating out compared to when shopping in supermarkets

Difficulty in choosing healthier food & meals



Consumers continue to struggle with choosing healthier meals when eating out.

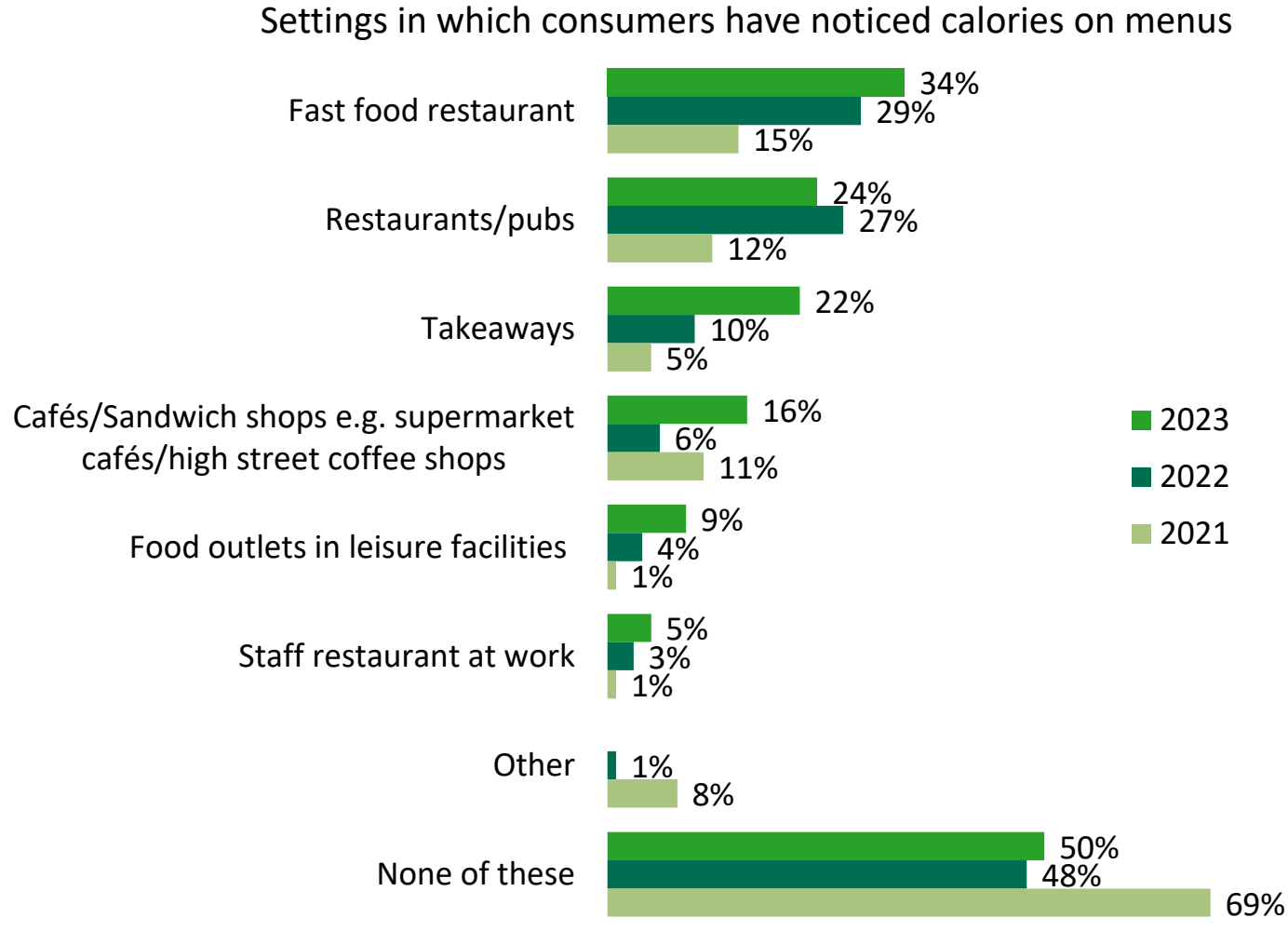
In 2023, the settings in which consumers found it most difficult to choose healthier food were:

- Takeaways (74%);
- Fast-food restaurants (64%); and,
- Places of leisure e.g. cinemas (60%).

Question H1a. Base: 2023 (601), 2022 (611) adults in Northern Ireland aged 18+



# Awareness of calories on menus remains low but is increasing

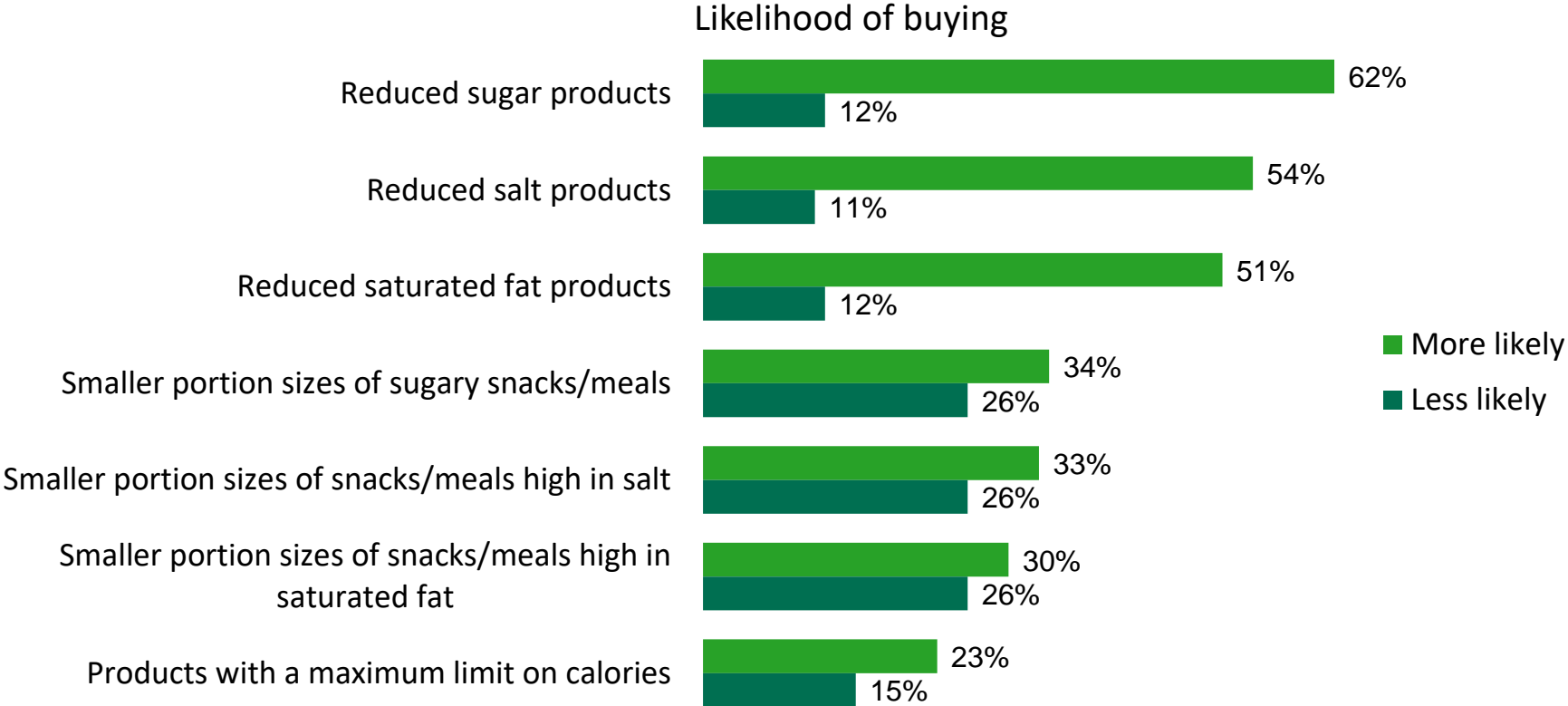


- Since 2022, there has been an increase in the number of consumers noticing calorie counts on takeaway (22%) and café menus (16%).
- In 2022 and 2023, around half of consumers did not notice calories on food menus in any of the settings; a significant drop from 69% in 2021.

Question H4a. Base: 2023 (601), 2022 (611), 2021 (603) adults in Northern Ireland aged 18+

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# Products reduced in sugar, salt or saturated fat are more appealing to consumers than products with smaller portion sizes or calorie limits



Question H2. Base: 601 adults in Northern Ireland aged 18+

# Sub-group analysis



# Gender



- Women (61%) were more likely than men (50%) to agree that their personal eating habits are healthy.
- While food shopping, a larger proportion of women (68%) try to choose healthier versions of products in contrast to men (55%). Similarly, when eating out, 29% of women try to choose a healthier option from the menu compared to 21% of men.
- Women (48%) were more likely than men (37%) to report having used the traffic light label when shopping for food and understand the purpose of traffic light labels (83% vs 75%).
- 84% of women would like to see more promotions on fruit and vegetables, compared to 76% of men.
- Men (38%) were more likely than women (25%) to say that they would not like to see healthier products in a range of food settings including restaurants and pubs, vending machines and staff restaurants.
- Men (32%) were more likely to report not wanting to see reformulated food or smaller portion sizes than women (20%).

# Age



- Participants aged between 35-54 (94%) were more likely to report shopping for food in a supermarket (including online) compared to those aged under 35 (81%) as well as those 55 and over (80%). Shopping with independent greengrocers, butchers, bakers or fishmongers is most popular among those over 55 (51%).
- Participants aged 25-54 (51%) were more inclined to use the traffic light label system while food shopping than those aged 18-24 (30%) and over 55's (35%).
- Choosing healthier foods in-store at a supermarket is easier for participants aged 18-54 (76%) than for those aged 55 and over (61%).
- Participants under the age of 55 (63%) are more likely to purchase products such as chocolate confectionary, crisps and snacks if they are on promotion. Those aged 25-34 (86%) and 45-54 (85%) would like to see more promotions on fruit and vegetables, compared to under 25s (69%).
- Those under the age of 55 were more likely than over 55s to say they would like to see healthier products in takeaways (39% vs 24%), fast food restaurants (36% vs 23%), food outlets in leisure facilities (30% vs 15%), and in vending machines (17% vs 8%).

# Socio-economic group



- Participants from higher socio-economic groups were more likely to agree that their personal (69%) and their children's (74%) eating habits were healthy compared to those from lower socio-economic groups (45% and 55%, respectively).
- Participants from higher socio-economic groups were more likely to opt for healthier options when food shopping (70%) and eating out (31%), compared to those from lower socio-economic groups (56% and 20%, respectively). They would also like to see more healthier options on the menu when eating out (45% vs 28%).
- Participants from lower socio-economic groups (48%) were less likely to find out how much calories, saturated fat, sugar or salt are in a product when food shopping in store than those from higher socio-economic groups (33%).
- Awareness of traffic light labelling, usage of the system, as well as understanding of its purpose is higher among those from higher socio-economic groups compared to those from lower socio-economic groups (96% vs 90%, 52% vs 34%, and 89% vs 71%, respectively).
- Those from higher socio-economic groups found it easier than those from lower socio-economic groups to choose healthier food and meals in store at supermarkets (80% vs 62%) in restaurants and/or pubs (53% vs 35%) and in fast-food restaurants (19% vs 8%).

# Conclusions



# Conclusions

- Additional consumer education is required to increase awareness of daily calorie intake, especially among men, as a low proportion understand the guidance on this. Awareness campaigns might be particularly effective if they target consumers at the point of purchase e.g. in-store at supermarkets, where the majority of consumers are doing their shopping.
- Food businesses can help consumer decision making by enhancing the visibility and clarity of nutritional claims on product packaging. Since a considerable proportion of consumers use nutritional claims when purchasing food, it is crucial that these claims are easy to understand and noticeable if they are to be effective.
- Efforts could be made to educate consumers on how to use traffic light labels to be able to identify healthier options. Despite a very high level of recognition, less than half of consumers actively use traffic light labels. Education efforts should have a specific focus on men, individuals from lower socio-economic groups, and those aged 55 and over, given lower reported usage among these audiences.
- Enhancing and increasing offers on fruit and vegetables could be considered in the future, given that the majority of consumers indicate a preference for such promotions, which in turn implies a strong market demand. However, it would be essential to ensure that these promotions appeal to consumers, in order to increase the current low frequency of purchase.
- Targeting healthier eating campaigns towards those in lower socio-economic groups could be a beneficial strategy as the data suggests less healthy eating habits and difficulties in choosing healthier options among those in lower socio-economic groups.



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**This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for market research, ISO 20252 and with the client contract.**

# Thank you.

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