



BUILDING A MORE INFORMED AND INCLUSIVE FOOD CULTURE

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THE CURRENT STATE OF FOOD MISINFORMATION

At this point in 2024, misinformation feels like it's spreading to every aspect of our lives – even the food we eat. There's so much nutrition content flooding social media that it's tough to know what is true and what isn't. Potentially dangerous food trends like raw milk are gaining momentum, while nourishing cuisines from certain cultures are being labeled as “unclean.” Even more concerning is that people in the U.S. don't seem to know which sources to trust, even though science-backed advice is plentiful. The country appears to be caught up in a food infodemic, where the gap between evidence-based guidance and people's eating habits is widening rapidly.

WHY THE AJINOMOTO GROUP CONDUCTED A NATIONWIDE STUDY

Few companies in the food world understand the implications of misinformation better than The Ajinomoto Group. In 1968, the New England Journal of Medicine coined the term “Chinese Restaurant Syndrome,” sparking decades of fear, myths, and anti-Asian xenophobia about monosodium glutamate (MSG), Ajinomoto's signature product. Over the years, our company championed science, facts, and flavor to enlighten people all over the world, but the impact of that single piece of misinformation can still be seen in the findings of this report.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The Food Infodemic Report by The Ajinomoto Group –created in partnership with YouGov – is a snapshot of the beliefs, trends, fears, and widespread confusion about eating in the age of social media. Along with the surprising datapoints collected from 3,000+ people in the U.S., are science-based facts and expert resources to encourage more informed eating habits. Just like the public has been enlightened on topics like eggs, healthy fats, and gluten, we believe that science can change minds on a large scale. By fighting food misinformation with real facts and real understanding, The Ajinomoto Group hopes to change the trajectory of this food infodemic and create a more informed, more inclusive food culture in the United States.

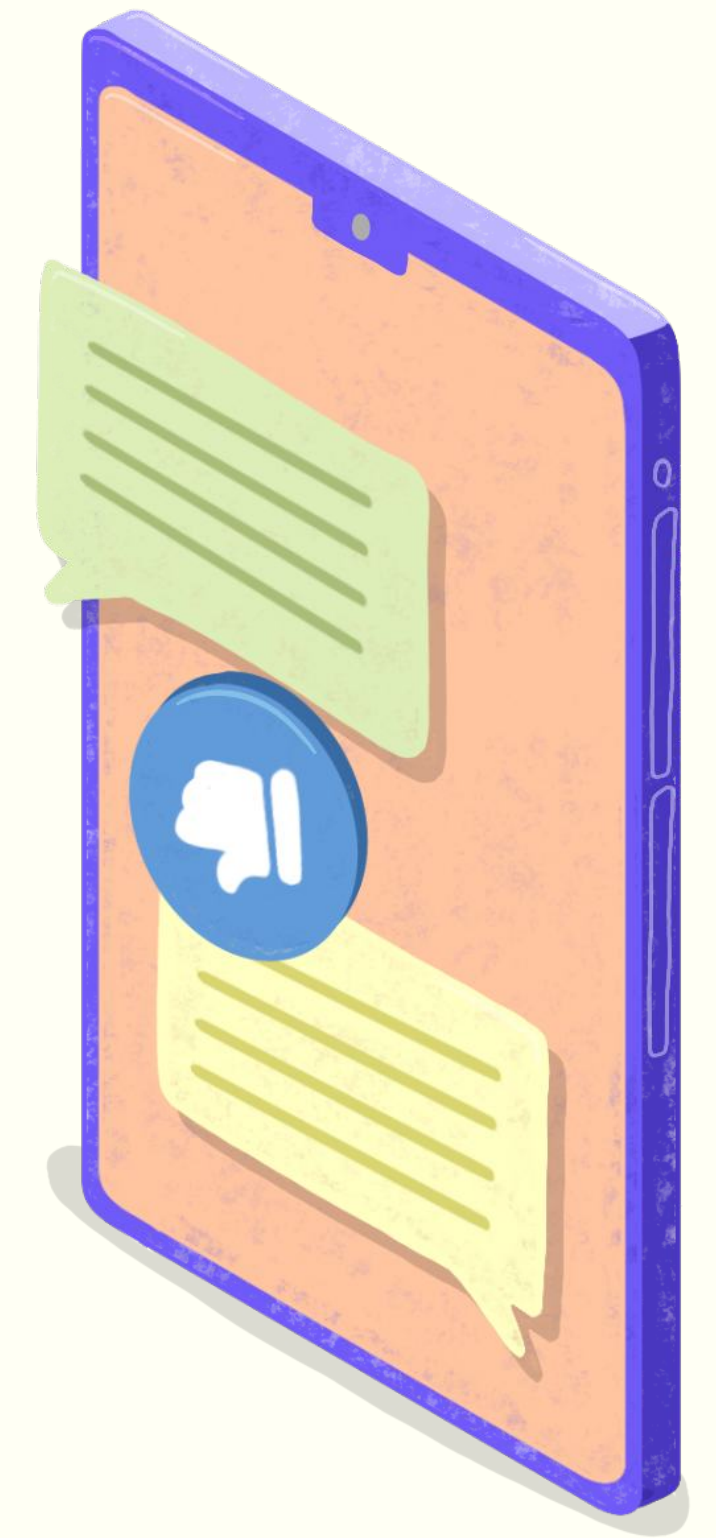
THE STUDY

OVERVIEW & METHODOLOGY

The Ajinomoto Group conducted a nationwide survey to understand the complicated state of eating in the U.S. and identify actions to bring people back to food as a source of joy, exploration, and cultural connection. The findings from the study have resulted in The Food Infodemic Report.

KEY AREAS OF EXPLORATION

- 01 IS FOOD AND NUTRITION MISINFORMATION WIDENING THE GAP BETWEEN SCIENCE AND CULTURE?
- 02 WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF PEOPLE'S INABILITY TO DISTINGUISH FOOD MYTHS FROM EVIDENCE-BASED FACTS?
- 03 WHAT EFFECTS HAS MISINFORMATION HAD ON PEOPLE'S FOOD CHOICES, BEHAVIORS, AND LIVES?



METHODOLOGY

The Ajinomoto Group fielded a 15-minute online survey in partnership with independent research firm, YouGov.

The survey was fielded from April 24-26, 2024 among a representative sample of 3,034 U.S. General Consumers with a margin of error of $\pm 1.79\%$ at the 95% level of confidence. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all U.S. adults (aged 18+).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MISINFORMATION, ESPECIALLY ON SOCIAL MEDIA, IS CREATING A FOOD CULTURE OF FEAR AND CONFUSION.

For many people, food and nutrition has gotten more confusing than ever.

Over 2 in 5 respondents (43%) have never felt more uncertain about their food choices, and over half don't really know who to believe when it comes to proper nutrition (55%).

WITHOUT TRUSTED, EVIDENCE-BASED SOURCES, PEOPLE ARE ADOPTING UNSCIENTIFIC EATING HABITS THAT CAN BE UNSAFE.

Wild claims and baseless fearmongering get shared faster than facts can keep up.

Chemicals are demonized. Ingredients with long names are avoided. And it's gotten to the point where over 1 in 10 people in the U.S. (14%) think cheese gives you nightmares. These may seem outrageous, but 71 % of respondents admit to adopting food beliefs and behaviors that aren't grounded in science.

Instead of relying on experts, people are getting their eating advice from the loudest voices on social.

Even as the majority of respondents admit they've likely fallen victim to food misinformation (55%), they're more likely to put garlic up their nose (30%) than regularly check if a social influencer is qualified (25%).

THIS CONFUSION LEADS TO AVOIDANCE OF UNFAMILIAR FOODS AND STIGMATIZATION OF CUISINES AND CULTURES.

The people most affected by food misinformation? Oftentimes it's communities of color.

Among those who believe they've been victims of food misinformation, 54% agree that their eating habits have also become less adventurous because of food safety concerns. Nearly half of respondents from communities of color have personally been (or seen others) ridiculed because of food from their culture or heritage, and 54% have seen misinformation online attacking a beloved food from their culture or heritage, nearly twice as likely as White respondents.

AJINOMOTO HAS BEEN DEALING WITH THE FALLOUT OF FOOD MYTHS SINCE 1968.

Decades after the baseless term "Chinese Restaurant Syndrome" was printed in the *New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM)*, 26% of respondents avoid restaurants that use MSG – with 20% of respondents avoiding Chinese foods entirely due to MSG concerns. The lingering stigma from NEJM impacts foods and people alike. 29% of Asian respondents have experienced stigma from "Chinese Restaurant Syndrome." Sadly, our brand knows all too well the impact that misinformation has on marginalized communities, and for 50+ years, we've been using facts to set the record straight.

It's time to bring science back to the table. Food is meant to be a source of joy, wellness, and cultural connection – not fear.

Nearly 9 in 10 respondents (87%) believe the food they eat is very personal – indicating that food makes up a core part of their identity.

77% of respondents say trying new foods brings them joy. People in the U.S. see food as a way to connect cultures – both their own heritage (63%) and other cultures (81%).

DETAILED FINDINGS



A FOOD INFODEMIC IS GROWING

“ OAT MILK VS ALMOND MILK, NO RED MEAT, ONLY WHITE MEAT, NO CARBS, LOW CARBS, HIGH PROTEIN, LOW FAT...

and the list goes on! It's honestly overwhelming and confusing. I feel like I get so frustrated just planning meals. I don't know what's healthy and what's not healthy anymore. The struggle is REAL.

GEN X PARENT

BASED IN THE NORTHEAST

”

FOOD IS A BASIC HUMAN NEED, YET IT SEEMS TO BE GETTING MORE AND MORE CONFUSING. GIVEN THE OVERWHELMING AMOUNT OF INFORMATION - BOTH TRUE AND UNTRUE - IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE THAT PEOPLE DON'T KNOW WHO TO TRUST.

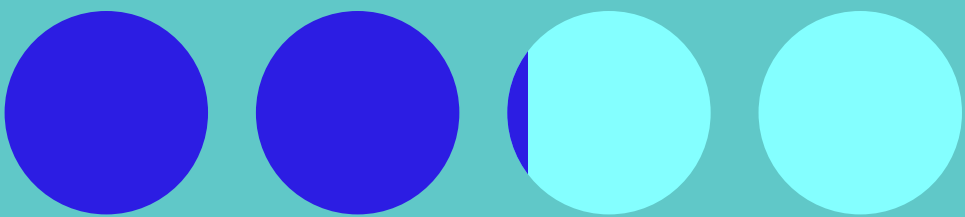


!!!
**+2 IN 5
RESPONDENTS**

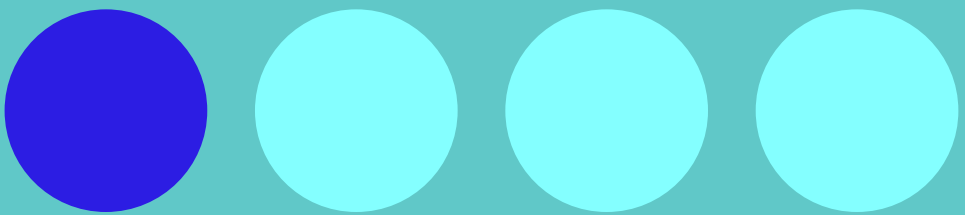
HAVE NEVER FELT MORE
UNCERTAIN ABOUT THEIR
FOOD CHOICES (43%)

FOR YOUNGER
GENERATIONS,
THE ISSUE IS EVEN
MORE SIGNIFICANT

TOTAL RESPONDENTS	43%
GEN Z	51%
MILLENNIALS	51%
GEN X	37%
BOOMERS+	35%



55% OF RESPONDENTS DON'T
KNOW WHO TO BELIEVE
ANYMORE WHEN IT COMES
TO PROPER NUTRITION



1 IN 4 RESPONDENTS
WOULD GO TO A SOCIAL
MEDIA INFLUENCER OVER A
GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION
FOR NUTRITION
INFORMATION (24%)

FOOD MISINFORMATION HAS GONE VIRAL

“ MISINFORMATION MAKES IT HARD TO BELIEVE WHAT IS ACTUALLY SAFE/ UNSAFE TO FEED MY CHILDREN.

Information is so much more available these days, both right and wrong.

MILLENNIAL PARENT

BASED IN THE WEST



Any generation can fall for food misinformation, but younger, more online groups appear more susceptible.

55%

OR OVER HALF OF PEOPLE IN THE U.S. BELIEVE THEY HAVE LIKELY BEEN A VICTIM OF FOOD AND NUTRITION MISINFORMATION

TOTAL RESPONDENTS 55%

GEN Z 60%

MILLENNIALS 59%

GEN X 53%

BOOMERS+ 50%



IF YOU THOUGHT THIS WAS A SPECIFIC PROBLEM FOR A SPECIFIC TYPE OF PERSON, YOU'LL SEE THAT ANYONE CAN BE A VICTIM OF MISINFORMATION.

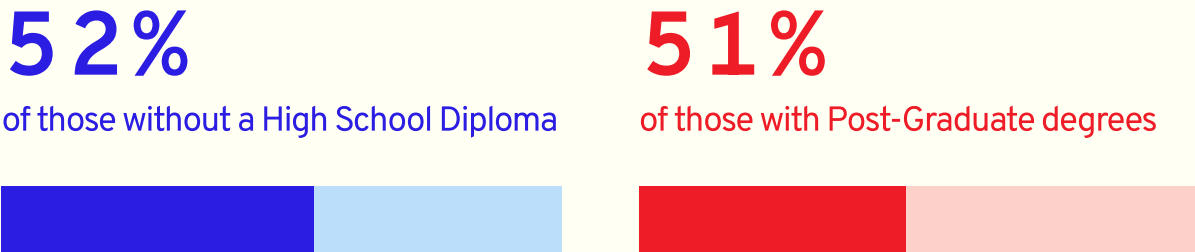
OUR DATA SUGGESTS FOOD MISINFORMATION THRIVES ACROSS ALL DEMOGRAPHICS.



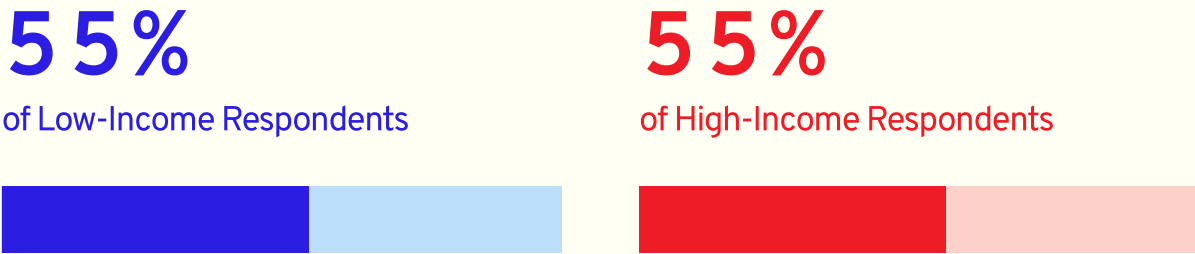
55% OF RESPONDENTS
*** AGREE ***

‘I have most likely been a victim of food and nutrition misinformation’

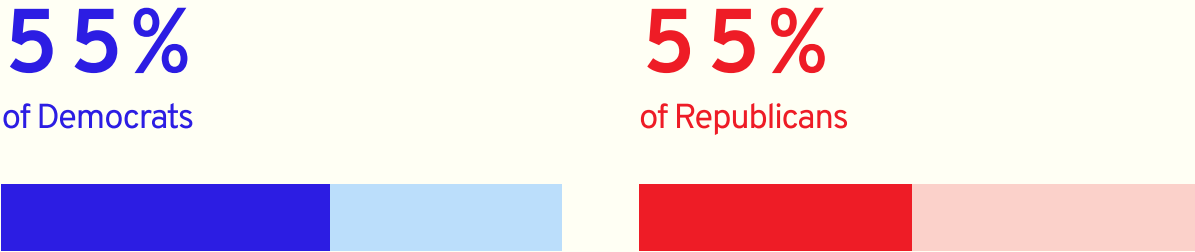
EDUCATION



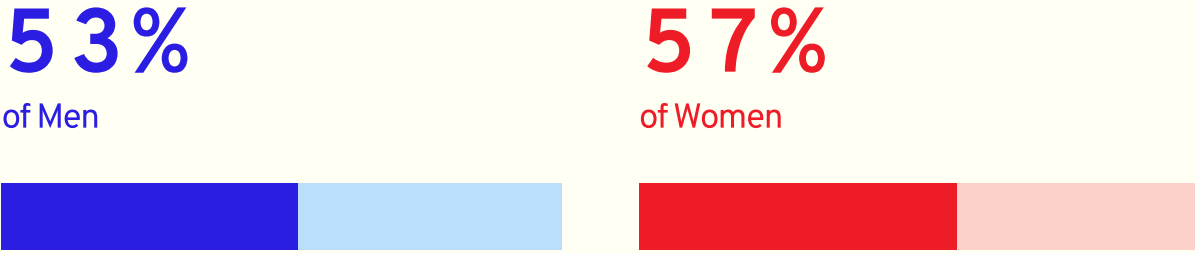
INCOME



POLITICAL PARTY



GENDER

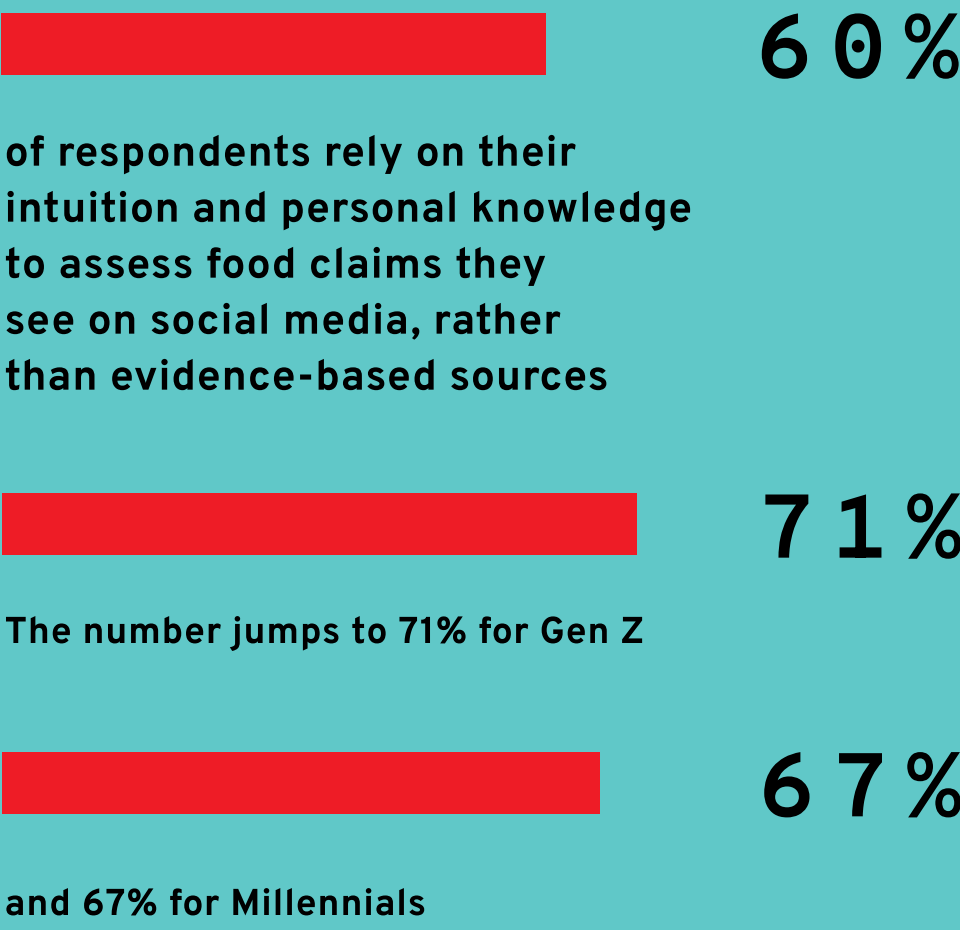


RACE



Note: Low Income defined as having a household income under \$40K, Middle Income as having a household income \$40K to \$79.9K, and High Income as having a household income \$80K+.

THERE'S SO MUCH CONTRADICTING CONTENT THAT PEOPLE HAVE BEGUN TRUSTING THEIR OWN INTUITION OVER EVIDENCE-BASED SOURCES.



FACT-FREE DIETS

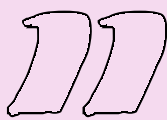
SOCIAL MEDIA HAS BECOME A GO-TO SOURCE FOR FOOD INFORMATION, BUT ANYONE CAN POST A VIDEO AND SPREAD THEIR OPINIONS



“ ONCE A FEARLESS FOODIE, I FELL VICTIM TO ONLINE GLUTEN MYTHS.

Docuseries and forums convinced me wheat was evil. I ditched my favorite foods, feeling isolated and restricted. One day, I discovered the truth - a website debunked the gluten hoax... food misinformation stole a year of joy.

GEN Z MAN
BASED IN THE
NORTHEAST



OVER 2 IN 3

HAVE SEEN CONTRADICTING
FOOD ADVICE ON SOCIAL
MEDIA (69%)

PEOPLE IN THE U.S. ARE MORE LIKELY TO PUT GARLIC UP THEIR NOSE THAN CHECK IF A SOCIAL INFLUENCER IS QUALIFIED

30%

OF RESPONDENTS HAVE TRIED OR WOULD CONSIDER TRYING PUTTING GARLIC IN THEIR NOSE FOR CONGESTION RELIEF VS

25%

OF RESPONDENTS REGULARLY CHECK TO MAKE SURE AN INFLUENCER IS QUALIFIED BEFORE LISTENING TO THEIR ADVICE

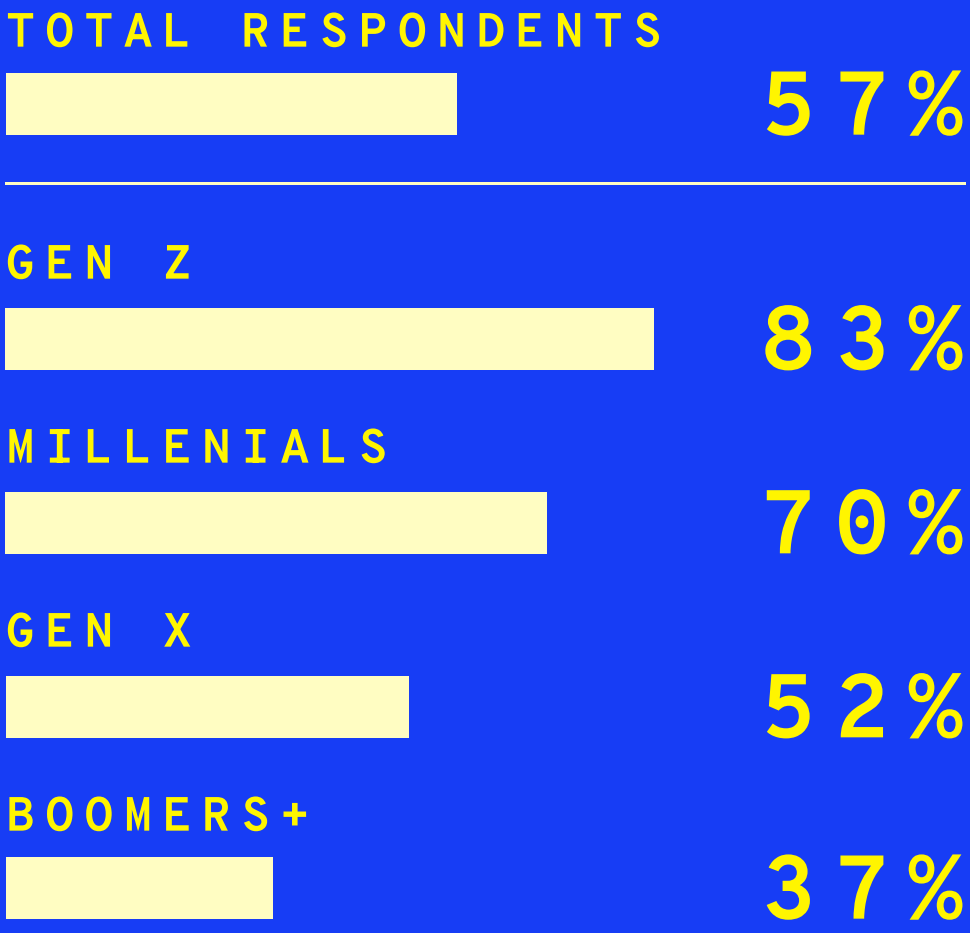


AS CREDIBLE SOURCES OF NUTRITION INFORMATION GET OVERPOWERED BY UNFOUNDED CONTENT, PEOPLE ARE EATING UP WHATEVER THEIR SOCIAL FEEDS SERVE THEM.

57%

OF RESPONDENTS CHANGED THEIR EATING BEHAVIORS BASED ON SOMETHING THEY SAW ON SOCIAL MEDIA

In fact, 1 in 4 even stopped eating a food they love based on information from social media.



Traditional sources of food and nutrition information have fallen by the wayside.

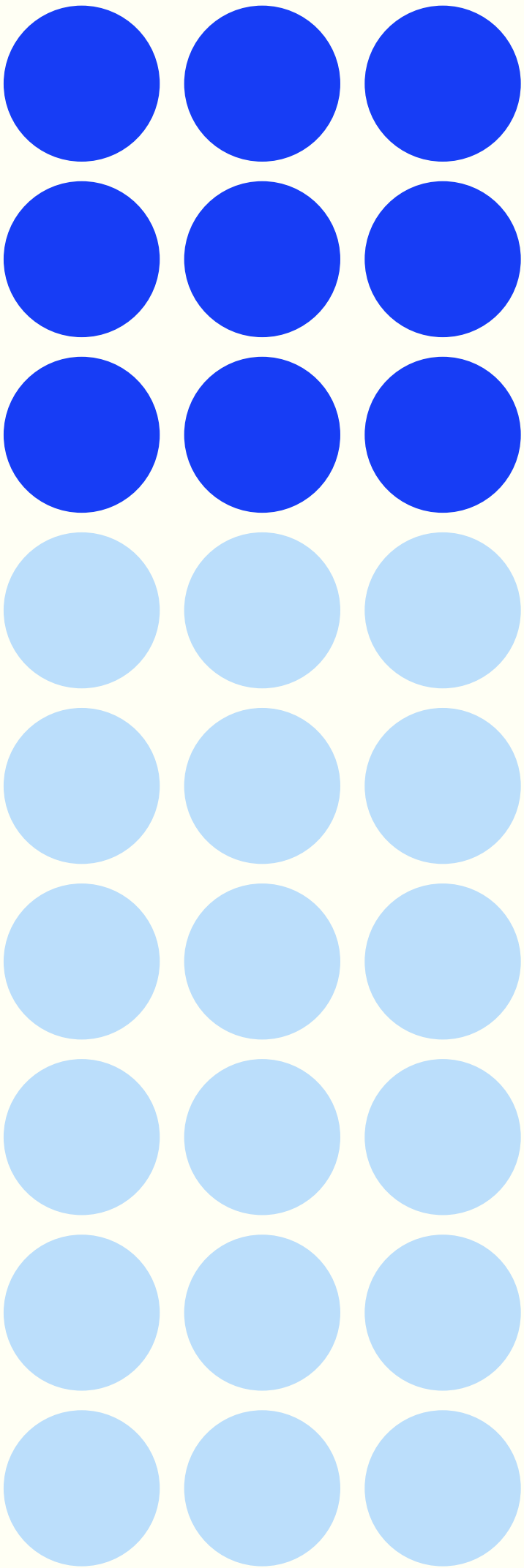
ONLY A THIRD OF RESPONDENTS REFERENDE MORE RELIABLE SOURCES AT LEAST ON A WEEKLY BASIS

SOURCES

26%
Online News Sites

15%
Medical Journals

14%
Government Websites



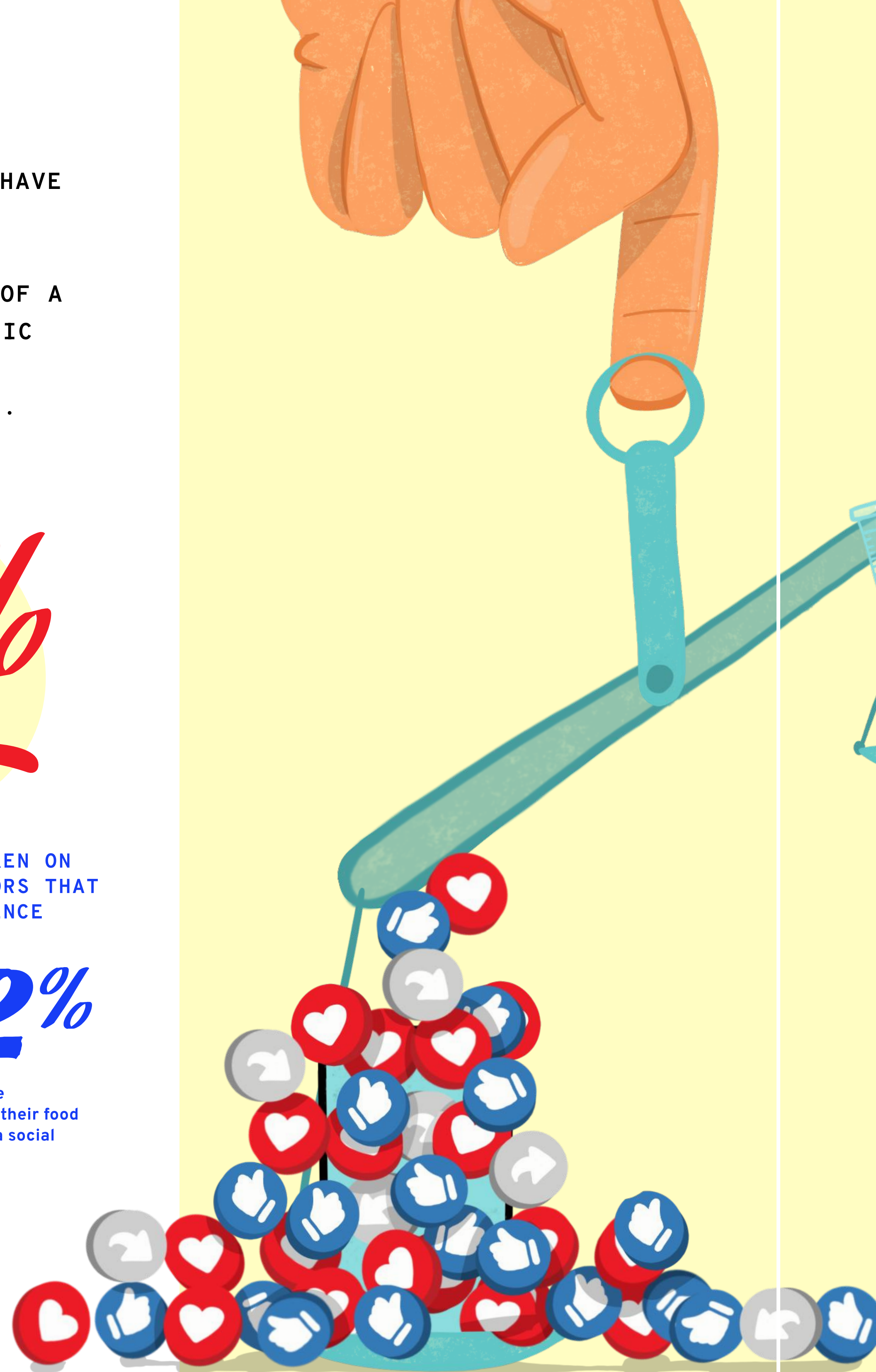
IN RESPONSE, PEOPLE HAVE DEVELOPED SOME ODD, MISINFORMED EATING HABITS. THE EFFECTS OF A GROWING FOOD INFODEMIC ARE MOVING IN A PERPLEXING DIRECTION.

71%

OF RESPONDENTS HAVE TAKEN ON NEW BELIEFS AND BEHAVIORS THAT AREN'T GROUNDED IN SCIENCE

52%

of these people frequently get their food information via social



“ WHEN SCIENCE IS IGNORED IN FAVOR OF FEARMONGERING TRENDS,

eating habits can get downright dangerous. Just look at the raw milk craze right now. According to the CDC, people who drink raw milk are 840 times more likely to contract a foodborne illness than those who drink pasteurized milk.

DR. JESS STEIER
DRPH, MPH, PMP

”

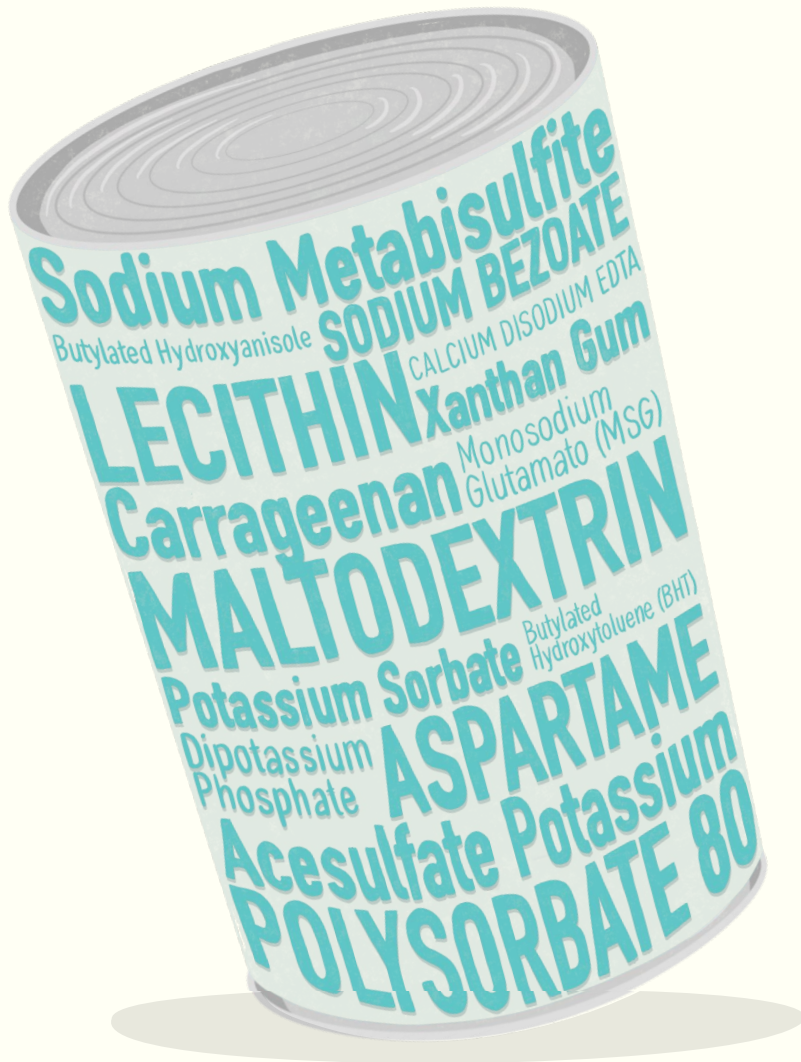


PEOPLE IN THE U.S. APPEAR TO BE UNNECESSARILY AVOIDING FOODS BASED ON OVERSIMPLIFIED, UNSCIENTIFIC BELIEFS.

56%

of respondents avoid eating or drinking anything that contains chemicals

FACT: All food contains chemicals because nutrients like protein and fiber are made of chemical compounds.



47%

of respondents avoid buying foods made with ingredients they can't pronounce

FACT: Even bananas contain difficult-to-pronounce compounds like phenolics, carotenoids, and phytosterols.

THE INFODEMIC IMPACT

“

Food misinformation in media has made me wary of certain food groups, leading to restrictive eating habits and fear of trying new foods.

I OFTEN FEEL
PRESSURED TO ADHERE
TO SPECIFIC DIETARY
TRENDS, **EVEN IF THEY
DON'T ALIGN WITH
MY PREFERENCES OR
NUTRITIONAL NEEDS.**

GEN Z MALE
BASED IN THE SOUTH

”

FROM H2O TO MSG, PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ADOPTING EATING HABITS AND BELIEFS THAT ARE AT ODDS WITH SCIENCE.

64%

WOULD AVOID CONSUMING DIHYDROGEN MONOXIDE (AKA WATER)

THE SCIENCE SAYS: DIHYDROGEN MONOXIDE IS THE CHEMICAL NAME FOR WATER.



60%

BELIEVE SPICY FOOD CAN CAUSE STOMACH ULCERS

THE SCIENCE SAYS:

THE AMERICAN COLLEGE OF GASTROENTEROLOGY NOTES THAT ULCERS ARE “NOT CAUSED BY SPICY FOODS OR A RICH DIET.”



62%

OF THOSE WHO THINK MSG IS UNSAFE CAN’T RECALL WHERE THEY HEARD THAT

THE SCIENCE SAYS:

THE U.S. FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION (FDA) HAS CLASSIFIED MSG AS A FOOD INGREDIENT THAT’S GENERALLY RECOGNIZED AS SAFE.

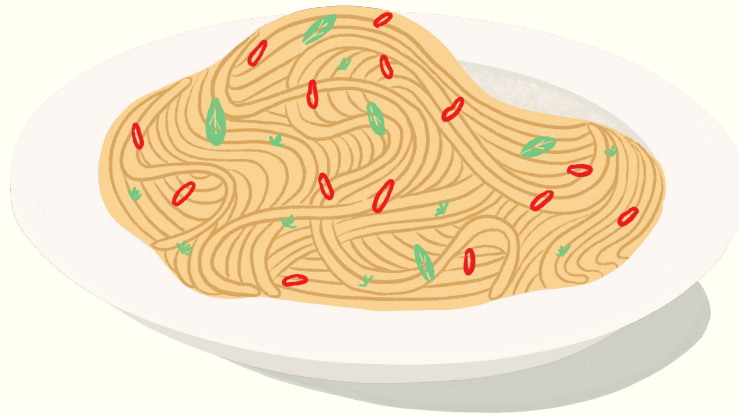


46%

HAVE TRIED OR WOULD CONSIDER TRYING REMOVING ALL CARBS FROM THEIR DIET

THE SCIENCE SAYS:

DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR AMERICANS 2020–2025 RECOMMEND THAT CARBS MAKE UP 45–65% OF TOTAL DAILY CALORIES FOR THOSE AGES 2 AND OVER.

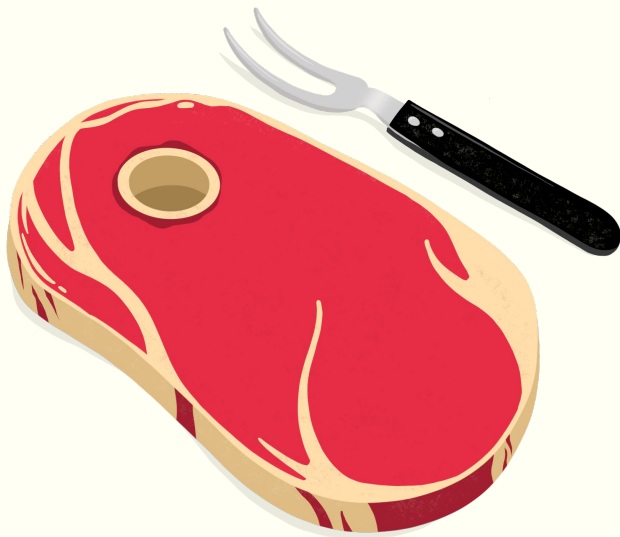


22%

HAVE TRIED OR WOULD CONSIDER TRYING THE RAW MEAT DIET

THE SCIENCE SAYS:

THE FDA STRONGLY ADVISES AGAINST CONSUMPTION OF RAW MEAT DUE TO FOODBORNE ILLNESSES, WHICH SICKEN 1 IN 6 PEOPLE IN THE U.S. EACH YEAR.



ADOPTING AND PERPETUATING UNSCIENTIFIC FOOD BELIEFS GOES BEYOND COMPROMISED HEALTH AND NUTRITION. IT BREEDS MISTRUST AND CONFUSION THAT CAN HAVE A TREMENDOUS IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS AND ON COMMUNITIES, ESPECIALLY COMMUNITIES OF COLOR.

WITH MISTRUST AND CONFUSION, COMES THE AVOIDANCE OF UNFAMILIAR FOODS AND SKEPTICISM OF CULTURALLY RICH DISHES.

The Ajinomoto Group knows this well. In 1968, the *New England Journal of Medicine* coined the term “Chinese Restaurant Syndrome,” sparking decades of fear, myths, and anti-Asian xenophobia about monosodium glutamate (MSG), The Ajinomoto Group’s signature product.



A MISINFORMATION ORIGIN STORY

“

I'm Chinese American, and my family owned a Chinese restaurant when I was growing up.

I'VE HAD OTHER STUDENTS CLAIM TO HAVE HEADACHES AND ACCUSE ME/MY FAMILY OF PUTTING MSG IN FOOD.

GEN X WOMAN

BASED IN THE WEST

”



“MSG is a cultural bridge that’s been connecting diverse traditions and enhancing flavors for over 100 years.

DESPITE THIS RICH HISTORY, MYTHS FUELED BY XENOPHOBIA AND MISINFORMATION HAVE LED PEOPLE IN THE U.S. TO AVOID CHINESE CUISINE ENTIRELY.”

– KAY LIU, CHEF

**MORE
THAN
1 IN 4**

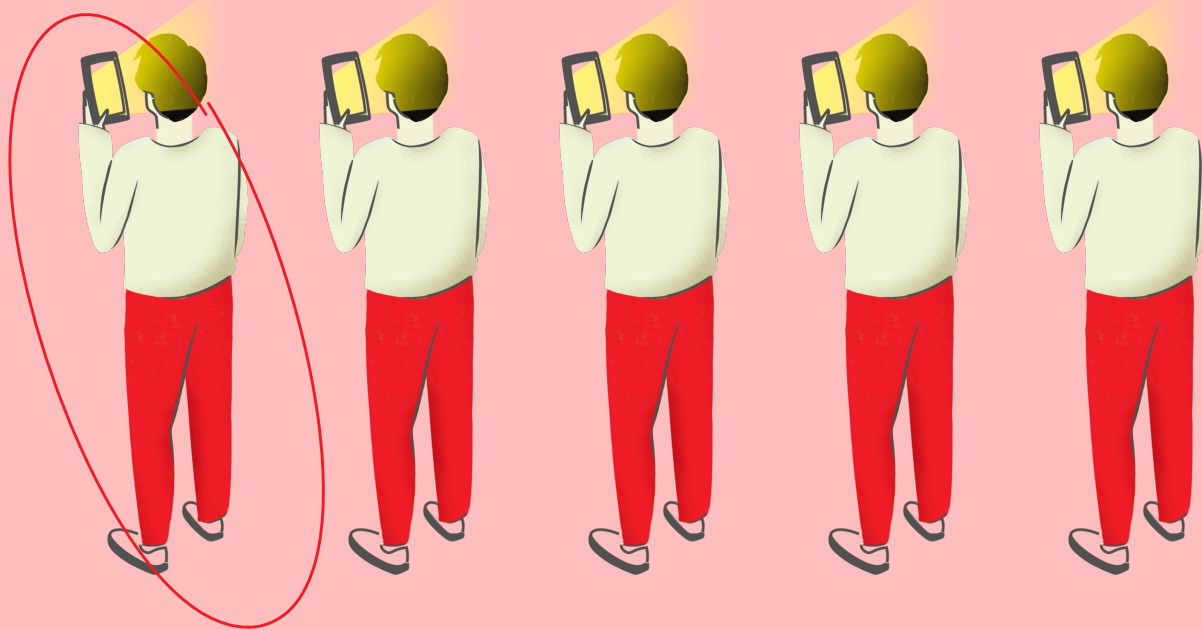
**ASIAN RESPONDENTS
(29%) HAVE EXPERIENCED
STIGMA FROM CHINESE
RESTAURANT SYNDROME**

(a debunked syndrome said to affect susceptible persons eating food heavily seasoned with MSG)



1 IN 5

RESPONDENTS AVOID
CHINESE FOOD BECAUSE
THEY WORRY ABOUT MSG



THE IMPACT OF WIDESPREAD MISINFORMATION GOES DEEPER - IT LIMITS PEOPLE’S ABILITY TO SAVOR FOOD FREELY.

For people who believe they have been victims of food misinformation,

54%

AGREE THAT THEIR EATING HABITS HAVE BECOME LESS ADVENTUROUS BECAUSE THEY’RE WORRIED ABOUT WHICH FOODS ARE SAFE TO EAT

34% of respondents have tried to avoid specific diverse cuisines in an effort to be healthier.



UNINFORMED OPINIONS OFTEN RESULT IN FOOD SHAMING, ESPECIALLY FOR COMMUNITIES OF COLOR AND THEIR BELOVED CUISINES.

54%

OF RESPONDENTS FROM COMMUNITIES OF COLOR HAVE SEEN MISINFORMATION ONLINE ATTACKING BELOVED FOOD FROM THEIR CULTURE OR HERITAGE; THIS IS TWICE AS LIKELY AS WHITE RESPONDENTS

48% OF RESPONDENTS

from communities of color have personally been, or have seen others be, insulted or ridiculed because of food from their culture or heritage

TOTAL RESPONDENTS	38%
ASIAN	52%
BLACK	46%
HISPANIC	46%
OTHER	44%
WHITE	33%

WHAT FOOD MEANS

“ It made me ashamed before, but now that I am older, I AM PROUD TO HAVE FOOD FROM MY OWN CULTURE IN MY MEALS AND LUNCH BOXES I TAKE TO WORK.

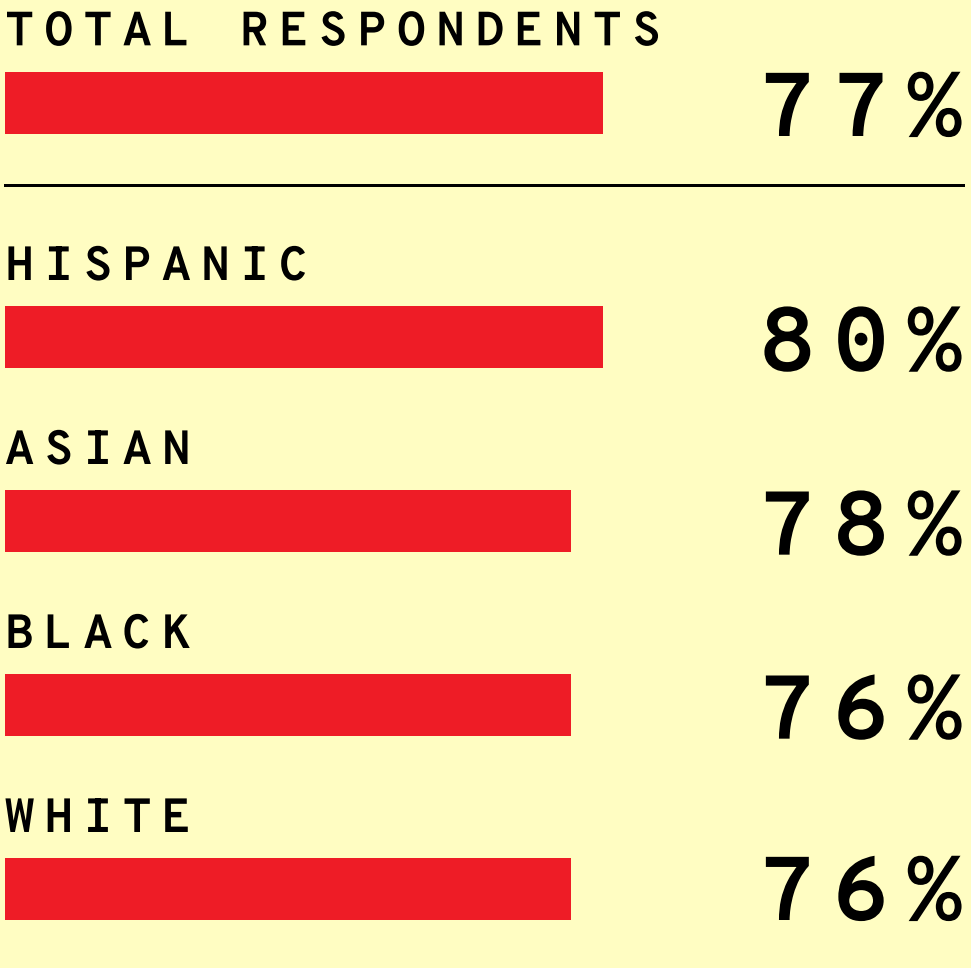
GEN Z ASIAN MAN
BASED IN THE NORTHEAST ”



DESPITE THE MISINFORMED FEAR AND CONFUSION, PEOPLE IN THE U.S. AGREE: EXPLORING NEW FOOD IS A SOURCE OF HAPPINESS.

OVER 3 IN 4

(77%) OF RESPONDENTS SAY TRYING NEW FOODS BRINGS THEM JOY



Trying different cuisines is one of the easiest ways for people in the U.S. to explore new cultures and connect with their own identity.



81%

OF RESPONDENTS SAY THAT FOOD ALLOWS THEM TO LEARN ABOUT OR EXPERIENCE OTHER CULTURES

Total Respondents 81%, Black 87%, Hispanic 85%, Asian 84%, White 79%.

FOOD SHOULD NOURISH US AND CONNECT US. TO MAKE THE BEST FOOD CHOICES, WE CAN'T DISMISS SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE IN FAVOR OF TRENDING ANECDOTE.

87%
of respondents say food choices are very personal

Total Respondents 87%, Black 89%, White 88%, Hispanic 83%, Asian 81%

63%
of respondents say that food is a way for them to connect with their heritage

Total Respondents 63%, Hispanic 80%, Asian 78%, Black 73%, White 55%



MAKING EVIDENCE-BASED FOOD DECISIONS IS NOT ONLY GOOD FOR US, BUT ALSO FOR OUR COMMUNITIES AND FOR OUR CULTURE.



“ TRUSTING HEALTH AUTHORITIES AND FOLLOWING EVIDENCE-BASED NUTRITION GUIDANCE

from credible nutrition professionals is key to making smart dietary choices. This doesn't just benefit us individually – it strengthens our entire community and helps preserve our cultural food traditions. By relying on science, we can ensure we're making decisions that keep us all healthier and safer in the long run.

CHARLOTTE MARTIN
MS , RDN



TAKING ACTION

With people in the U.S. feeling more confused than ever and not knowing who to turn to, join us in helping to create a more informed and inclusive food culture.

Let's spark conversations to debunk food myths, overturn stigma, and inspire thoughtful food exploration.

ACTIONS FOR A MORE INFORMED AND INCLUSIVE FOOD CULTURE

1

VERIFY SOURCES ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Look beyond anecdote and opinion to check that your sources are using current, evidence-based information. **When in doubt, don't share!**

4

CROSS-CHECK WITH TRUSTED SOURCES

There are many health and nutrition sites offering information based on reviews of evidence: [FDA.gov](https://www.fda.gov), [Nutrition.gov](https://www.nutrition.gov), and [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov), to name a few.

2

REVIEW CREDENTIALS

Rely on registered dietitians (RDs) for sound nutrition advice; **find the right RD for you at [EatRight.org](https://www.eatright.org).**

5

REFLECT ON YOUR FOOD BELIEFS

Where did they come from? Are they worth sticking to? **Consider trying something new – you might surprise yourself.**

3

ASK QUESTIONS

If you see something that sounds questionable (Quick detox! Secret remedy!), **respectfully ask where the information is coming from.**

THE FOOD INFODEMIC *REPORT*

BY **AJINOMOTO®**

For over 100 years, The Ajinomoto Group has been committed to advancing the science of food and promoting evidence-based nutrition through ongoing research and partnerships.

Visit [KnowMSG.com](https://www.knowmsg.com) and follow Know MSG (@Know_MSG) on Instagram and TikTok (@KnowMSG) to join the conversation.

AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS

Among N=3,034 general consumers
fielded to be representative of the U.S.

AGE

18-34	30%
35-54	29%
55+	40%

GENERATION

GEN Z	17%
MILLENNIALS	28%
GEN X	23%
BOOMERS+	32%

GENDER

MALE	49%
FEMALE	51%

RACE

WHITE	62%
HISPANIC	16%
BLACK / AFRICAN AMERICAN	12%
ASIAN AMERICAN	6%
OTHER	5%

REGION

MIDWEST	21%
NORTHEAST	18%
SOUTH	38%
WEST	24%

INCOME

LESS THAN \$40,000	33%
\$40,000-\$79,000	27%
\$80,000+	26%
PREFER NOT TO SAY	14%

EDUCATION

GRADUATED HIGH SCHOOL OR LESS	40%
SOME COLLEGE OR VOCATIONAL SCHOOL / TECHNICAL SCHOOL	31%
GRADUATED COLLEGE	18%
POST-GRADUATE DEGREE	11%

MARITAL STATUS

MARRIED / IN RELATIONSHIP	52%
NOT MARRIED / IN RELATIONSHIP / OTHER	48%

CHILDREN UNDER 18

YES	24%
NO	76%