

Consumer Behaviors, Knowledge, and Perceptions Related to the Nutrition Facts Label: Findings from the 2019 FDA Food Safety and Nutrition Survey (FSANS)

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FDA

Introduction

Having a better understanding of consumers' use, understanding, and perceptions of the Nutrition Facts label can provide critical information to facilitate effective consumer education and ultimately encourage healthier dietary choices.

Materials and Methods

FSANS Methodology Overview

FDA's Food Safety and Nutrition Survey (FSANS) is FDA's premier national probability consumer survey designed to elicit information about consumers' knowledge, understanding, and reported behaviors on a variety of food safety and nutrition-related topics.

- FSANS uses an addressed-based sampling (ABS) method, mail-push-to-web
- Sample size=4,398
- General population; U.S. adults 18+
- Fielded October to November 2019
- Response rate 28%
- English and Spanish
- Some questions versioned – half the sample completed the nutrition questions

Nutrition Facts Label Questions on FSANS

A total of 9 questions related to the Nutrition Facts label were asked on FSANS:

- General use of the Nutrition Facts label: 4 questions
- % Daily Value (%DV): 3 questions
- Perceptions of the label: 1 question
- Serving size: 1 question

An image of the new Nutrition Facts label was provided to participants on the survey questionnaire.



Analysis

- Frequencies were performed on the 9 questions related to Nutrition Facts label.
- Wald chi square tests were performed to examine relationships between consumers' reported knowledge and use of the Nutrition Facts label and different demographics and covariates.

Results and Discussion

1. 87% U.S. adult consumers reported having looked at the Nutrition Facts label on food packages.

- Frequencies of consumers reported having looked at the label differed by gender and education.

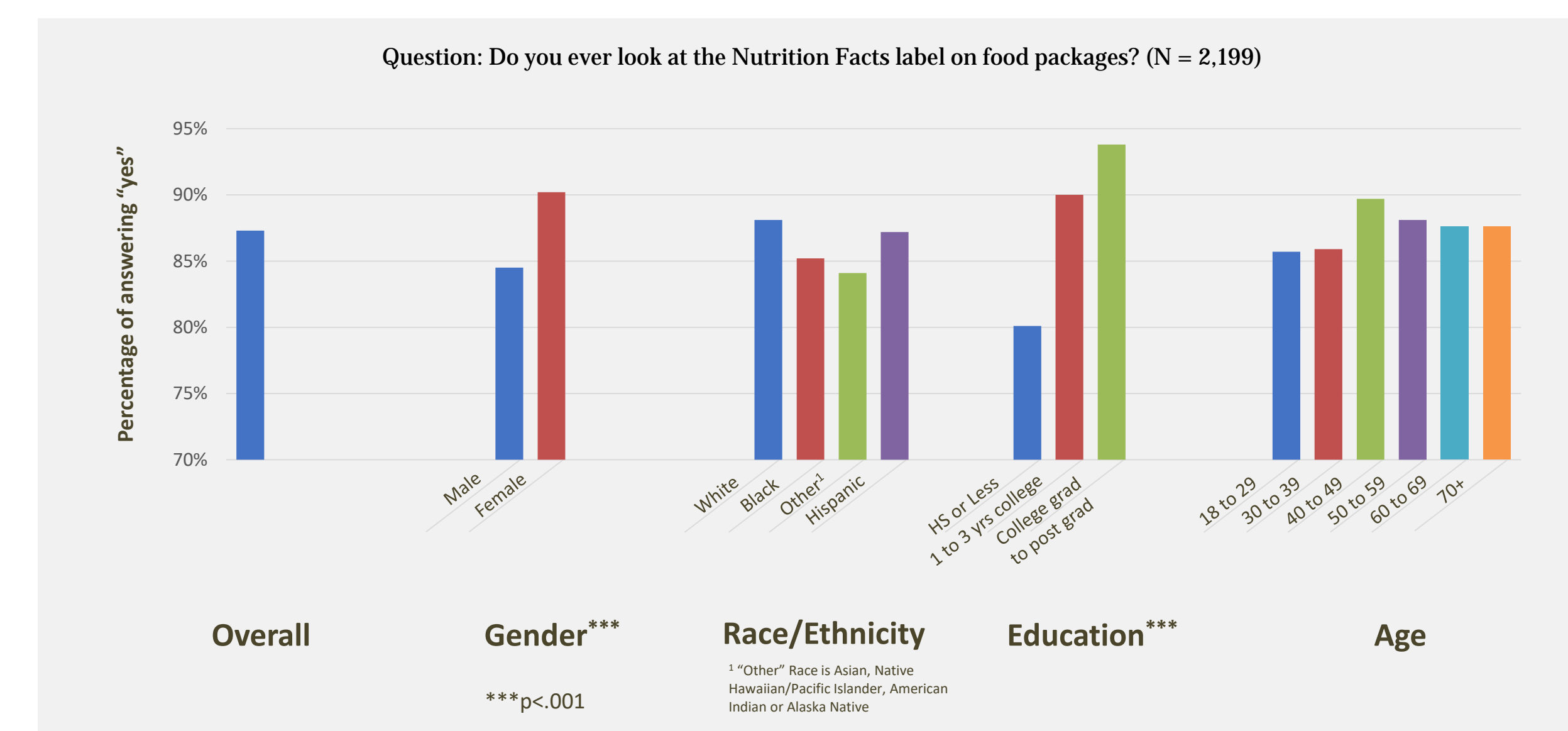


Figure 1. Frequencies of consumers reported having looked at the Nutrition Facts label, by demographics

2. When buying a food product for the first time, 23% U.S. adult consumers said they "always" use the Nutrition Facts label, 34% said they use it "most of the time", 31% said "sometimes".

3. The top three common uses of the label include: to see how high or low the food is in things like calories, salt, vitamins, or fat; to get a general idea of the nutritional content of the food; and to compare different food items with each other.

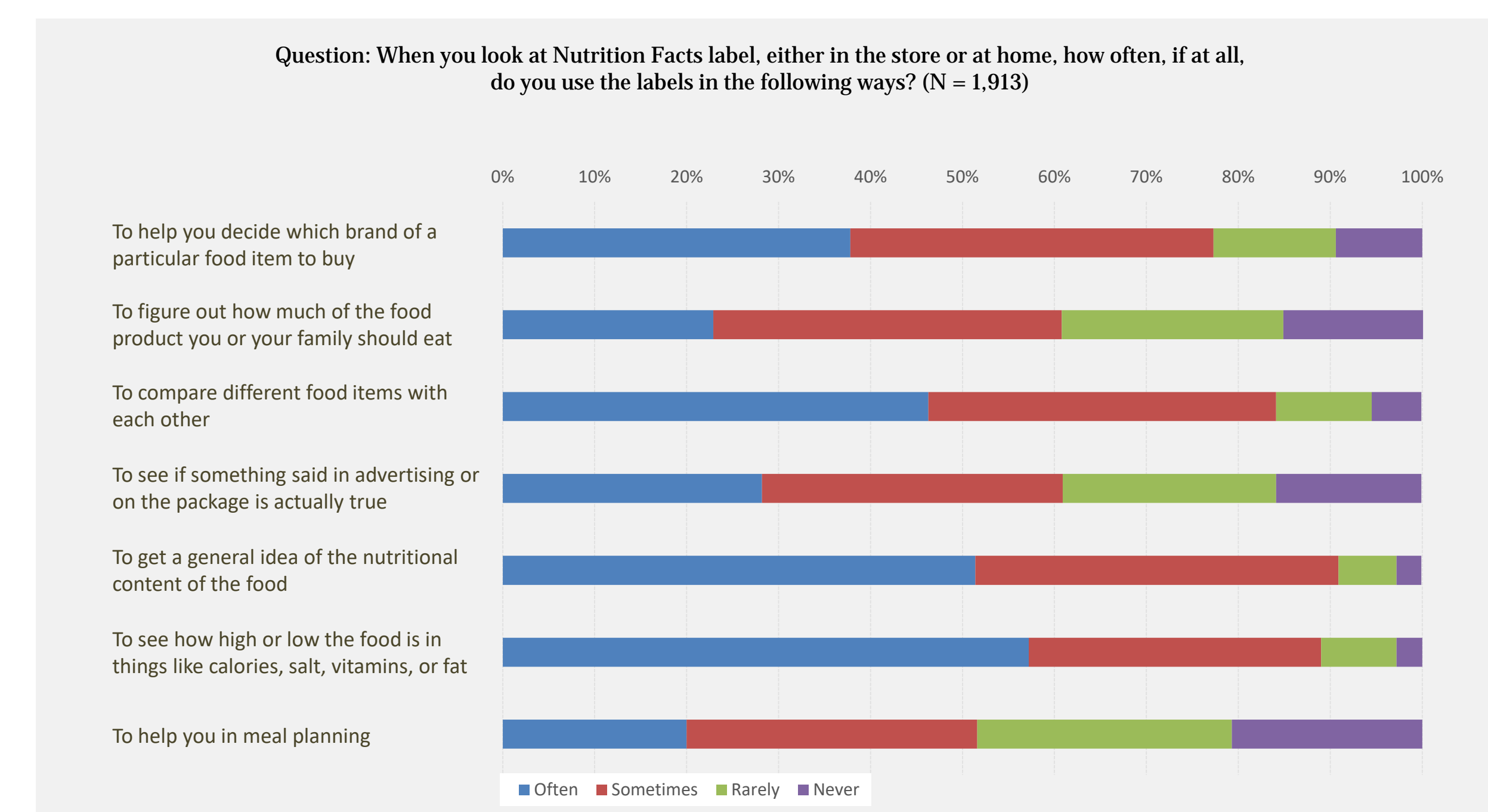


Figure 2. Frequencies of consumers reported using the Nutrition Facts label in different ways.

4. The top four items consumers look for while looking at the label are calories, total sugars, sodium, and serving size.

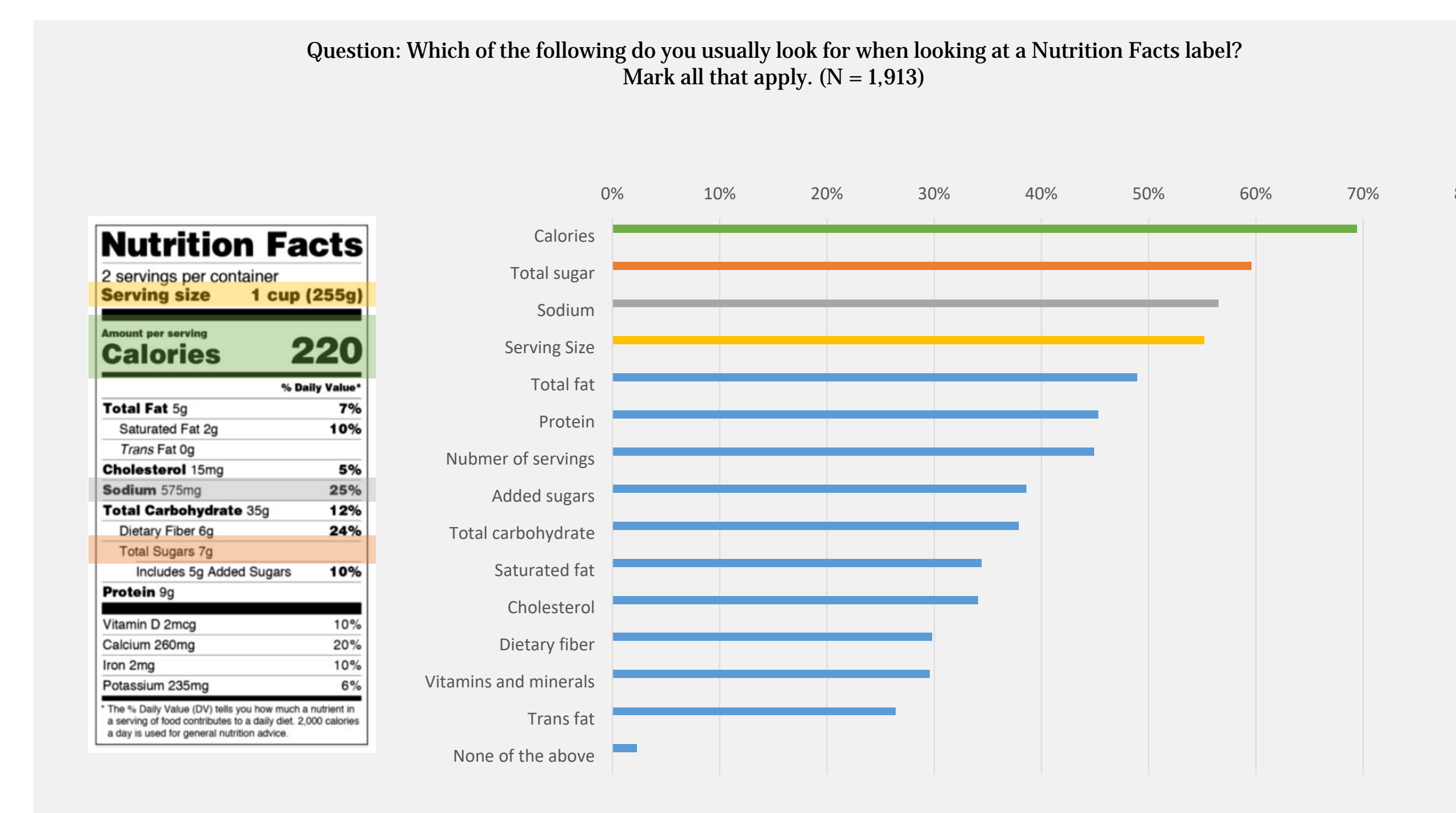


Figure 3. Frequencies of items consumers reported looking for while looking at a Nutrition Facts label.

5. 56% U.S. adult consumers reported looking at %Daily Value (%DV) when looking at the Nutrition Facts label. Among these consumers, 18% said they only look at the %DV while 38% said they look at both the %DV and the gram or milligram amount.

6. 67% consumers thought serving size meant "the amount of a food that people should eat" when it is meant to be something that makes it easier to compare foods.

7. Consumers' knowledge of %DV varied by education and BMI.

Two questions were asked on FSANS to examine consumer understanding of %DV.

- Question 1:** The Nutrition Facts label shows that the product contains 7% Daily Value for Total Fat in a serving of the product. What does the 7% Daily Value mean to you?
- 7 percent of the calories in one serving of the product come from Total Fat
 - One serving of the product contains 7 percent Total Fat by weight
 - One serving of the product contains 7 percent of the Total Fat that an average person should eat in an entire day [Correct]
 - Don't know

- Question 2:** The Nutrition Facts label shows that one serving of the food contains 25% of the Daily Value (DV) of Sodium. Based on the information, would you consider a serving of this product to have a low, medium, or high amount of Sodium?
- Answer Options: Low; Medium; High [Correct]; Don't know

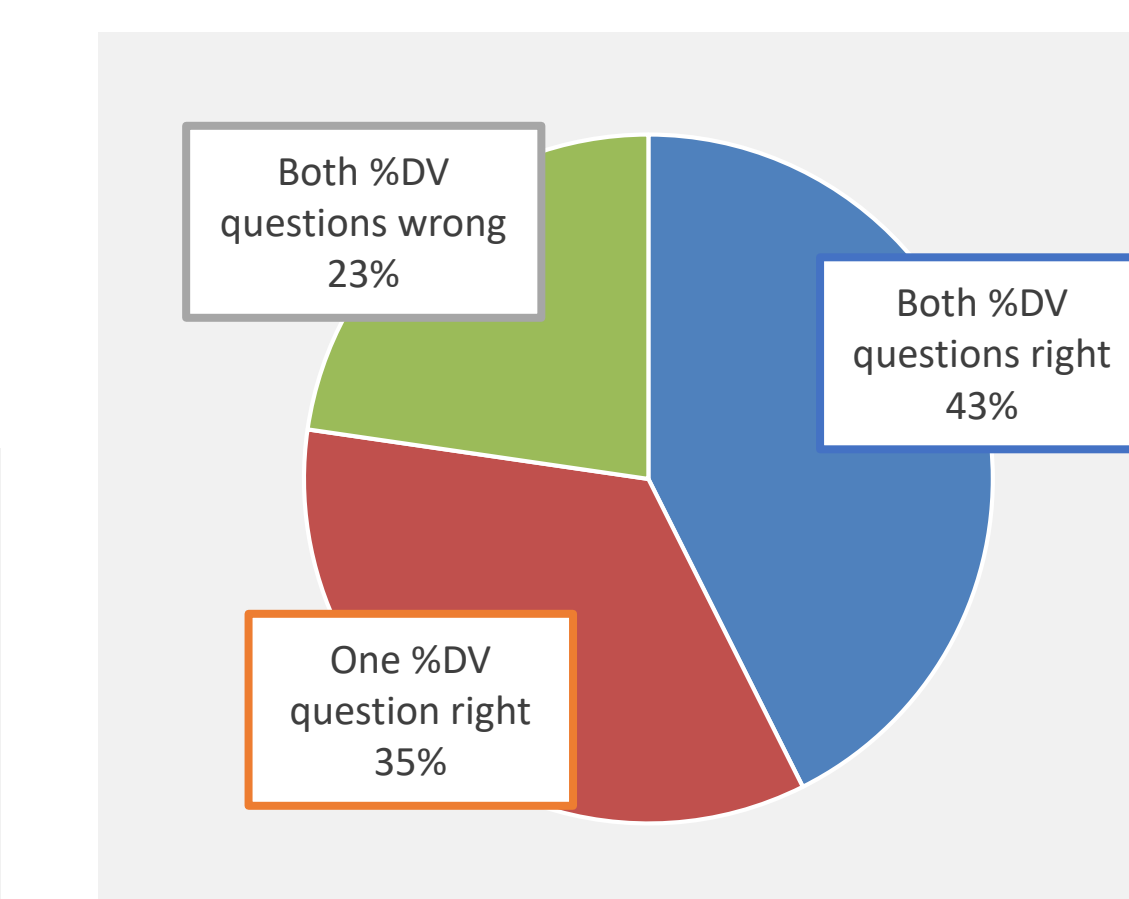


Figure 4. Percentages of consumers answering both, one, and neither %DV knowledge question correctly.

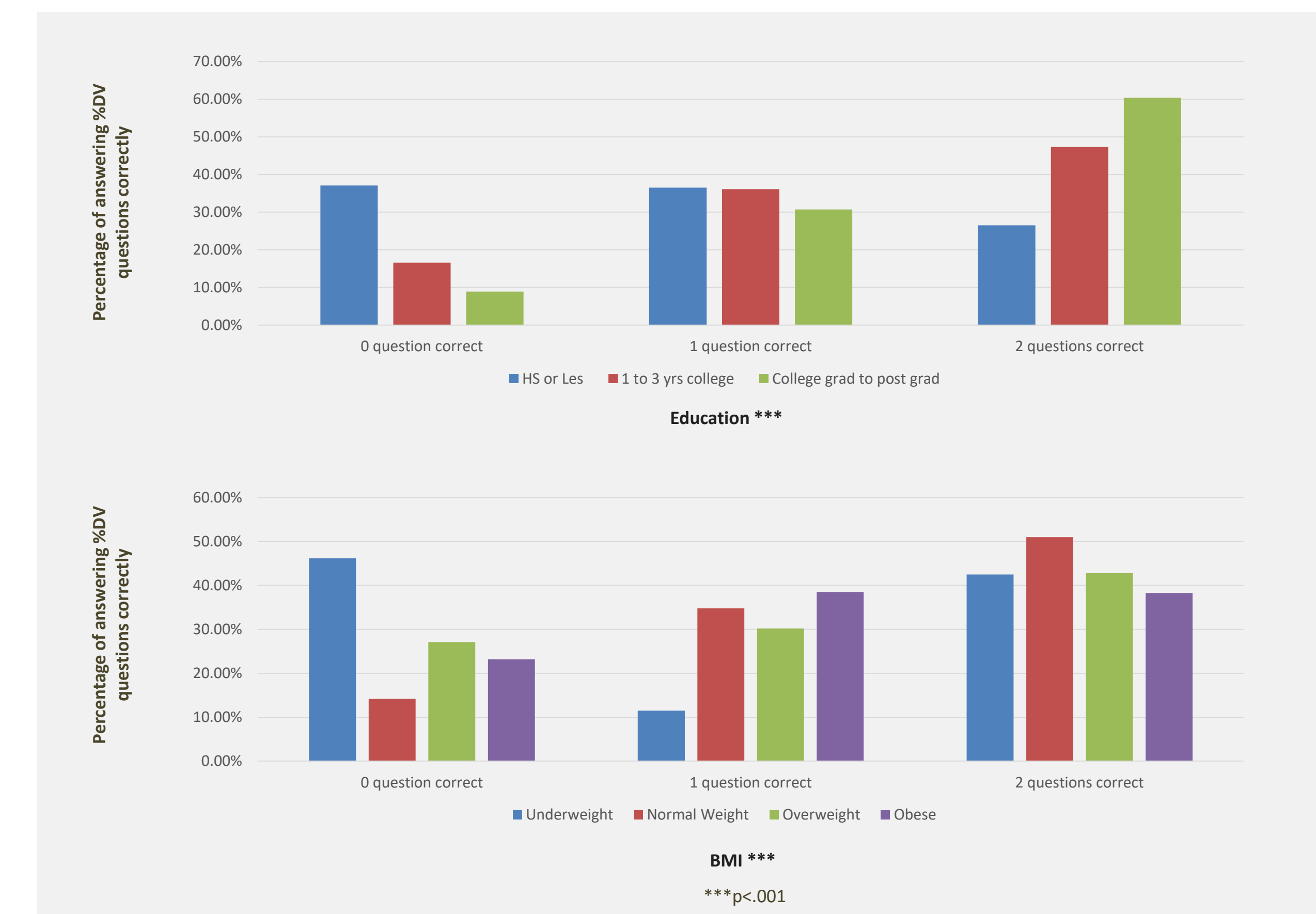


Figure 5. Percentages of consumers answering both, one, and neither %DV questions correctly, by education and BMI.

8. Most consumers have positive opinions about the Nutrition Facts label. With the oldest and youngest being the least likely to think the Nutrition Facts label is easy to understand.

Conclusion

- Findings from FSANS provide important insights for educating consumers about the Nutrition Facts label, targeted toward certain populations.
- This is the first FDA survey where consumers were shown an image of the new Nutrition Facts label; therefore, these findings can serve as a reference point for future data collections.
- Because the FSANS data collection was completed in Fall 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, these findings can also serve as a reference point for any comparisons of consumers' reported knowledge, behaviors, and perceptions related to the Nutrition Facts label before and after the pandemic.

The Summary Report of the 2019 FSANS can be found at: <https://www.fda.gov/food/science-research-food/2019-food-safety-and-nutrition-survey-report>