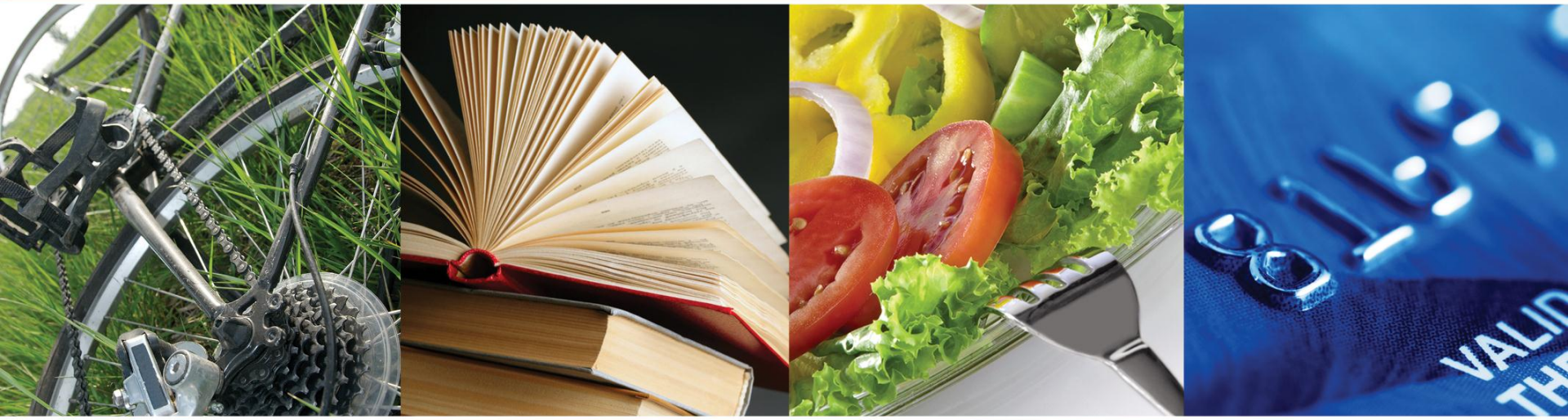
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# What Americans Think of Willpower

*A Survey of Perceptions of Willpower & Its Role in Achieving Lifestyle and Behavior-Change Goals*

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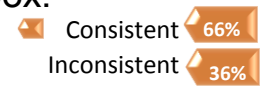
# Background and Methodology

- The American Psychological Association commissioned Harris Interactive to conduct the 2011 Stress in America™ survey to understand the perceptions of stress and its impact among the general public. After the survey concluded, all respondents who were still active Harris Poll panelists were re-contacted to participate in a follow-up survey.
- The goal of this research is to build upon the 2011 Stress in America survey by taking a deeper look at the role of willpower and motivation when making lifestyle and behavior changes.
- The Stress in America™ follow-up survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of the American Psychological Association between December 22 and 30, 2011 among 566 of the 1226 adults who participated in the 2011 Stress in America™ survey. The response rate for the follow-up survey was 46 percent.
- Results were weighted as needed for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.
- Because the sample is based on those who were invited to participate in the Harris Interactive online research panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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# Report Structure

- The following terms are used throughout the report and defined as follows:
  - "**Motivated**" = Adults ages 18+ who report they are extremely or very motivated to make the lifestyle and behavior changes they are working on (Q700)
  - "**Not motivated**"= Adults ages 18+ who report they are somewhat or not at all motivated to make the lifestyle and behavior changes they are working on (Q700)
  - "**Consistent**" = Adults ages 18+ who report their motivation level to make the lifestyle and behavior changes they are working on is very or somewhat consistent (Q705)
  - "**Inconsistent**" = Adults ages 18+ who report their motivation level to make the lifestyle and behavior changes they are working on is very or somewhat *inconsistent* (Q705)

- Significant differences are noted by small colored boxes, such as this:
  - A small colored box such as, "," appearing next to a percentage in a chart or call-out box indicates that percentage is significantly higher than the percentage corresponding to the color of that box.
  - For example, 

means that 66 percent is significantly larger than 36 percent.
- Responses may not add up to 100 percent due to weighting, computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses.

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# Executive Summary – Willpower Findings

- **Almost everyone (93 percent) surveyed reported making a resolution to change some aspect of their behavior in 2012. Yet people consistently report that a lack of willpower is the top reason they fall short of their goals to lose weight, save more money, exercise or make other lifestyle changes.**

- The most frequently reported goals that people set for 2012 were those aimed at improving health (57 percent reported a goal to lose weight, 50 percent reported a goal to eat a healthier diet, and 41 percent reported a goal to start exercising regularly) or financial status (52 percent reported a goal to save more money, and 37 percent reported a goal to pay off debt), according to the follow-up survey. For adults trying to make a lifestyle change, however, willpower is an important factor. The annual Stress in America survey found that one in four reported that lack of willpower (27 percent) or time (26 percent) prevented them from making the change they were trying to achieve. Despite difficulties with willpower, a majority of those responding to the annual survey (71 percent) believe that willpower can be learned, which is good news since psychological research demonstrates that this is true.

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# Findings from Stress in America 2011

- **The vast majority of adults in the annual Stress in America™ survey have either received a recommendation to make a lifestyle change or have decided to do so independent of a recommendation. In addition, adults have reported that although they find healthy behaviors to be important, they are having a difficult time being successful at leading a healthy lifestyle. Year after year, willpower is the most commonly cited barrier to making lifestyle and behavior changes.**
  - Over the past five years, most adults have set goals for themselves to improve their health in some way including eating a healthier diet (77 percent), exercising more (75 percent), losing weight (66 percent), reducing stress (60 percent) and getting more sleep (58 percent).
  - In the annual survey, when adults were asked to identify barriers preventing them from making lifestyle changes they decided to make or that were recommended to them, the most common barrier cited was lack of willpower (27 percent).
  - Despite setting these goals, more than half (52 percent) say they did not use any strategy to help them be successful.

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# Findings from Follow-up Survey December 2011

- **In the follow-up survey, adults who reported in the original survey that they had decided to make a change or that they had received a recommendation to make a change were asked a follow-up question about the status of their change. With the exception of reducing or eliminating alcohol consumption, the majority had not made or were not maintaining the change. However, it is likely that utilizing effective strategies to help them achieve their goal will improve the likelihood of success.**
  - Fewer than half of adults who indicate a change was recommended or they decided to make a change when they were interviewed in August or September of 2011 report that the have made or are maintaining the change  with the exception of reducing or eliminating alcohol consumption.
  - Although half of adults (50 percent) find monitoring their progress to be an important element when working to make a lifestyle or behavior change, only 30 percent report they do an excellent or very good job monitoring their progress.
    - However, those who reported they track their goals by writing them down or logging them electronically were more likely than those who tracked their goals mentally to report successfully exercising more (45 percent vs. 34 percent) and reducing stress (35 percent vs. 23 percent).

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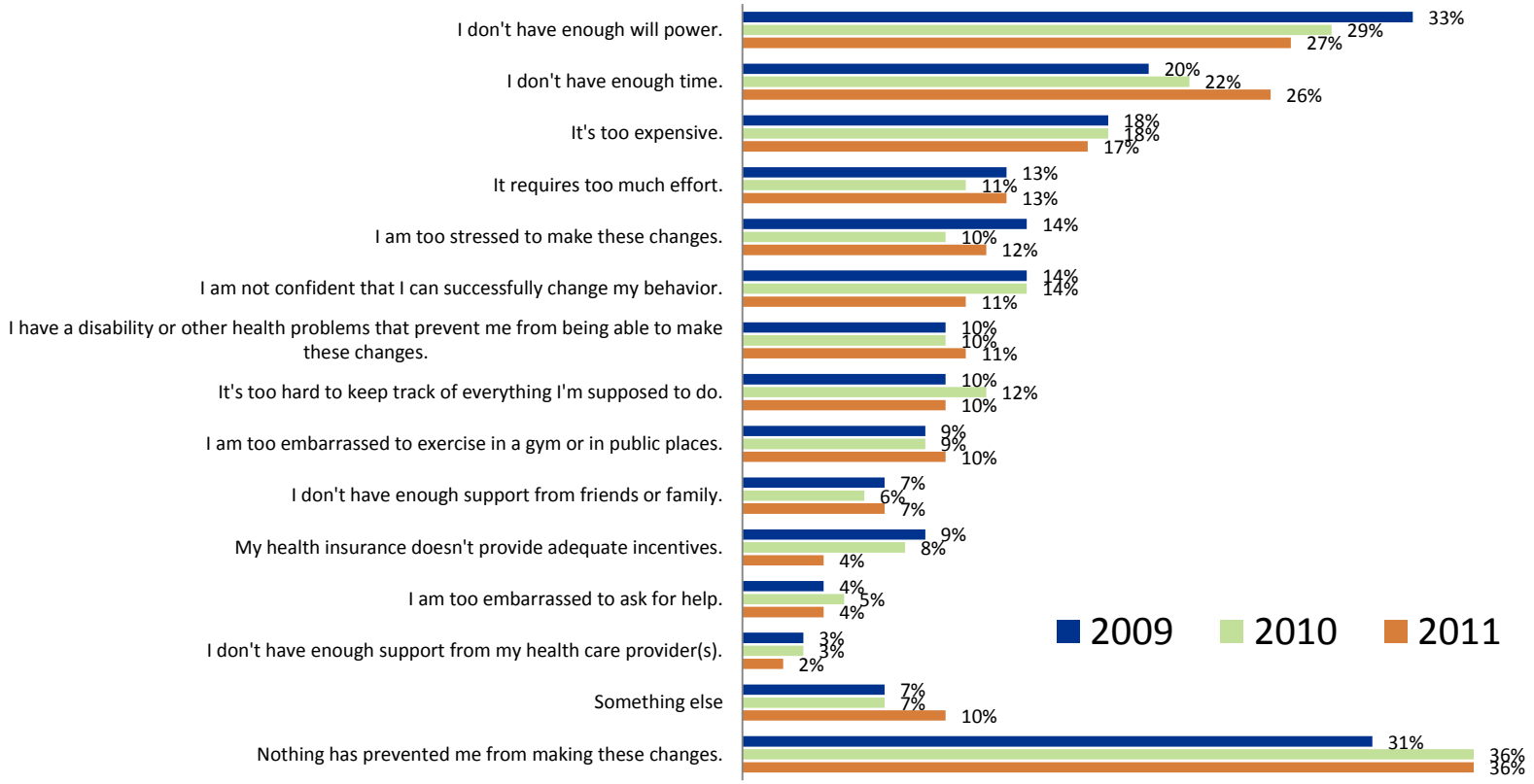
# Findings from Follow-up Survey December 2011

- **Motivation seems to be playing a key role in success as those who are more highly motivated to make lifestyle and behavior changes are significantly more likely than those with lower motivation to report success in achieving the goals they have set for themselves.**
  - When asked to describe their motivation levels and consistency of motivation, less than half described themselves as extremely or very motivated to make the behavior changes (37 percent).
    - Furthermore, less than one-fifth (17 percent) described their motivation level as very consistent.
  - However, adults who report that they are extremely or very motivated to make the lifestyle or behavior change were significantly more likely than those who report that they are somewhat or not at all motivated to report success for the following: eating a healthier diet (71 percent vs. 29 percent), getting more sleep (48 percent vs. 26 percent), exercising more (65 percent vs. 12 percent), losing weight (47 percent vs. 10 percent), and reducing stress (43 percent vs. 7 percent).

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# 2011 Stress in America: Barriers to Change

When adults were asked during the 2011 Stress in America survey what barriers prevented them from making lifestyle changes they decided to make or that were recommended to them, the most common barrier cited was willpower (27 percent).




**BASE: SiA HCP Recommended Changes 2009 (n=1568); 2010 (n=735); Decided to Make a Change 2011 (n=1168)**

* Multiple responses are possible

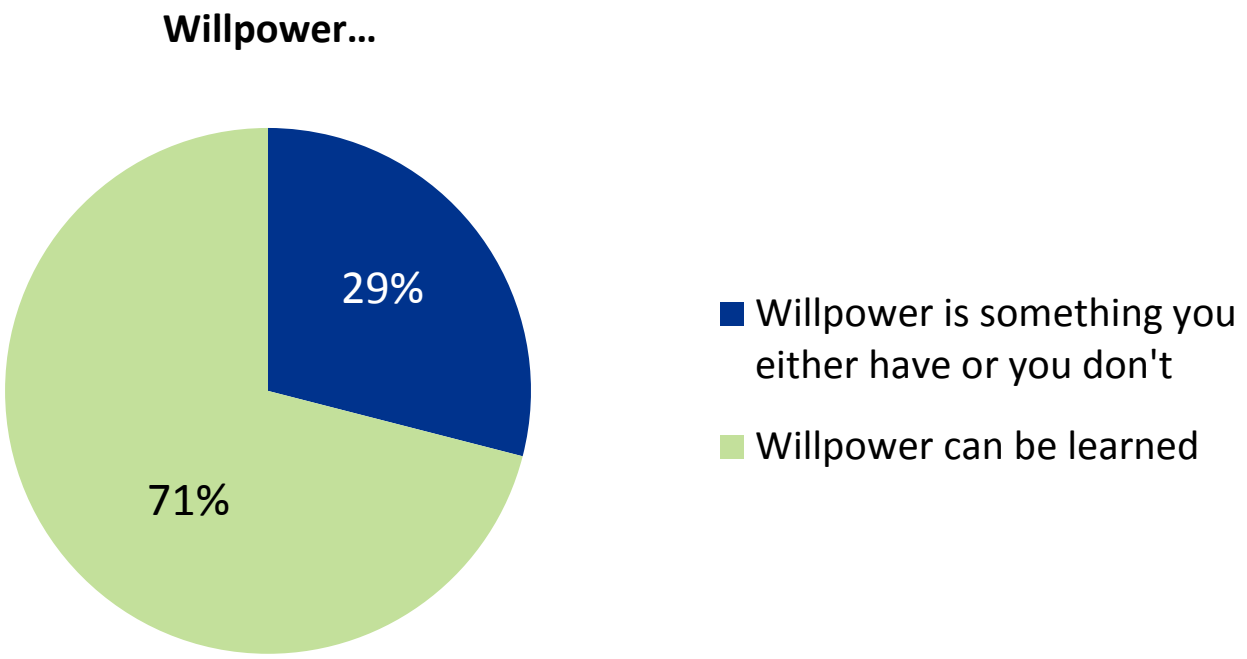
**Q2255** Which of the following, if any, have prevented you from making the lifestyle changes your health care provider has recommended? Please select all that apply.

*Wording changed in 2011 to 'Which of the following, if any, have prevented you from making the lifestyle changes you decided to make or that were recommended to you? Please select all that apply.'

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# 2011 Stress in America: Willpower

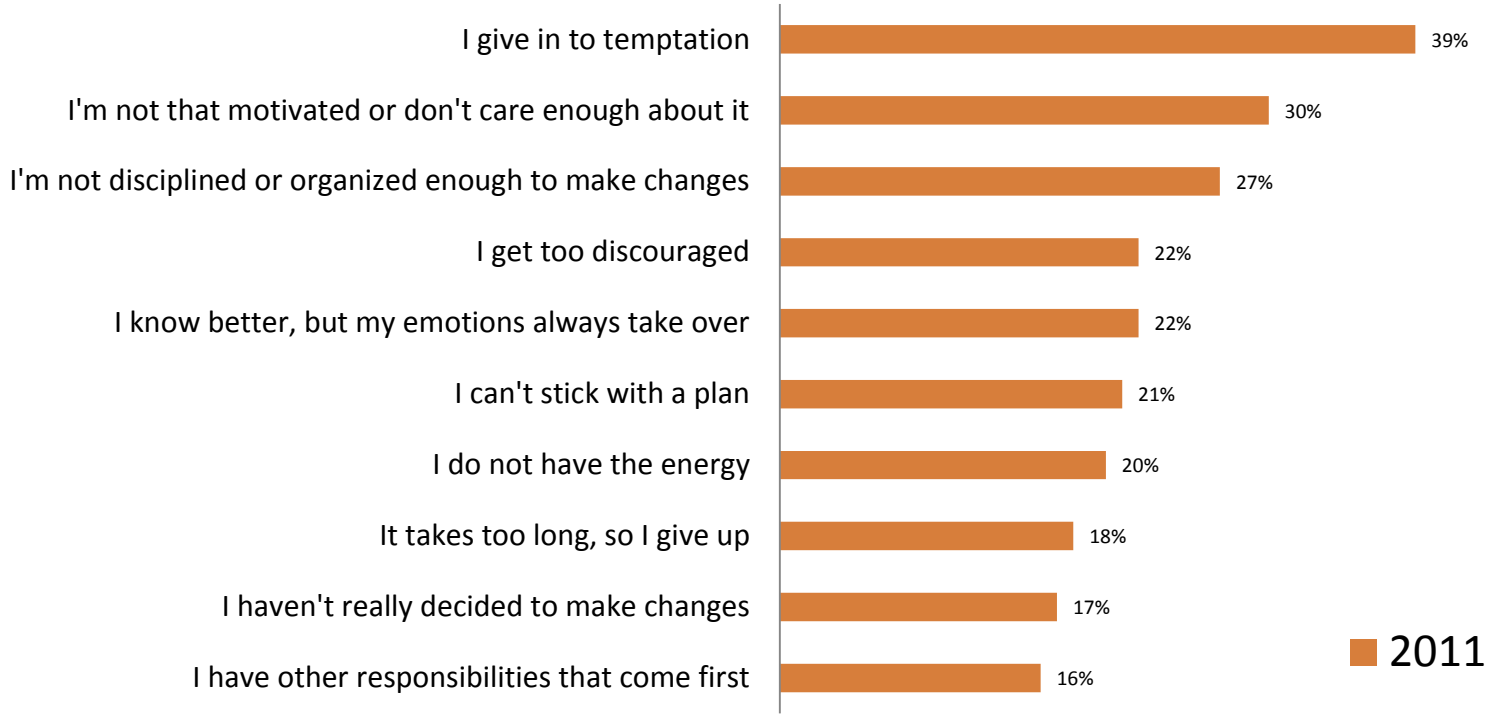
The majority of adults (71 percent) say willpower can be learned.




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# 2011 Stress in America: Defining "Lack of Willpower"

The most common definitions of lack of willpower include giving in to temptation (39 percent), not being motivated or caring enough (30 percent), and not being disciplined or organized enough (27 percent).



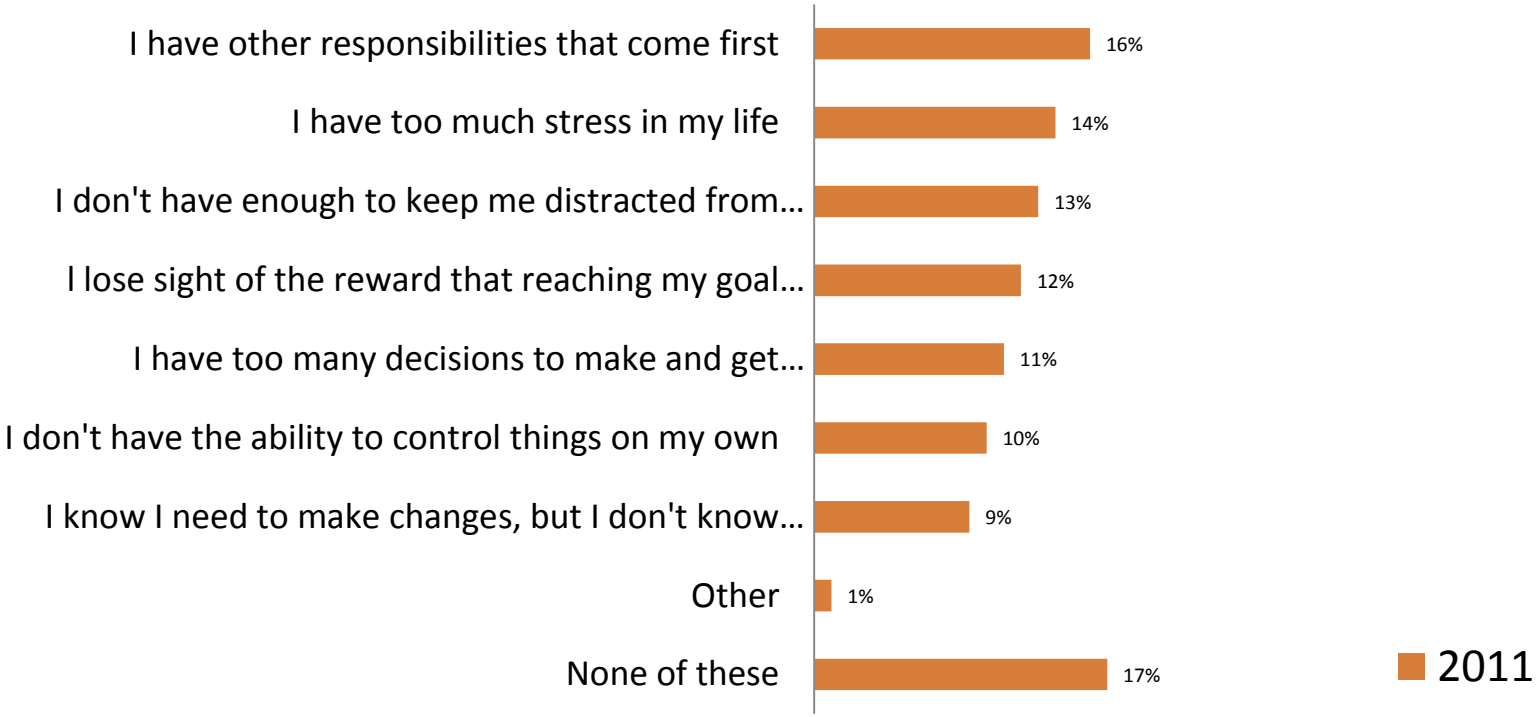

**BASE: All respondents SiA 2011 (n=1226)**

* Multiple responses are possible

**Q7035** Which of the following most closely defines what lacking willpower means to you? Please select all that apply.

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# 2011 Stress in America: Defining “Lacking Willpower” (con’t)




**BASE: All respondents SiA 2011 (n=1226)**

* Multiple responses are possible

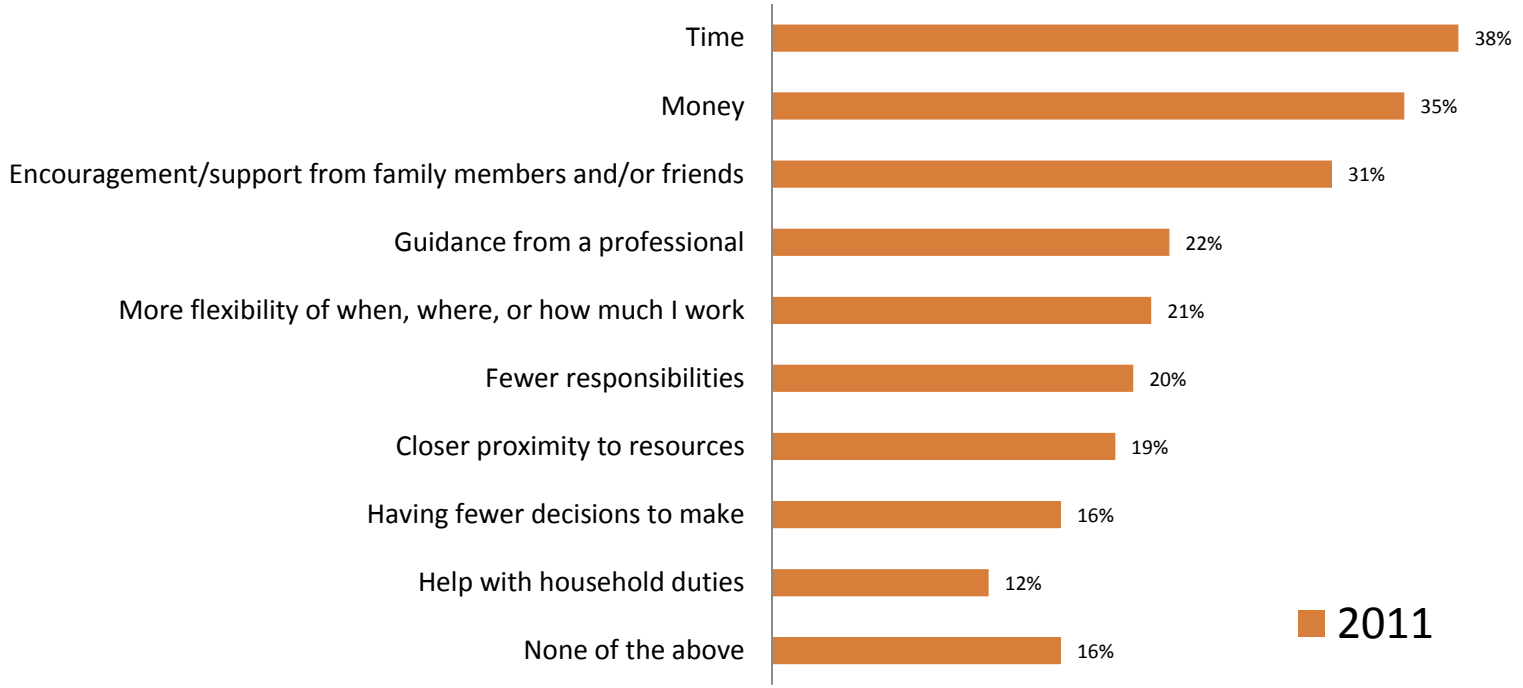
**Q7035** Which of the following most closely defines what lacking willpower means to you? Please select all that apply.

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# 2011 Stress in America: External Resources to Improve Willpower

Nearly 4 in 10 (38 percent) of those who reported that lack of willpower prevented them from making a behavior change selected time as the resource they think would help them improve their will power.

**Which of the following do you think would most help you improve your willpower?**

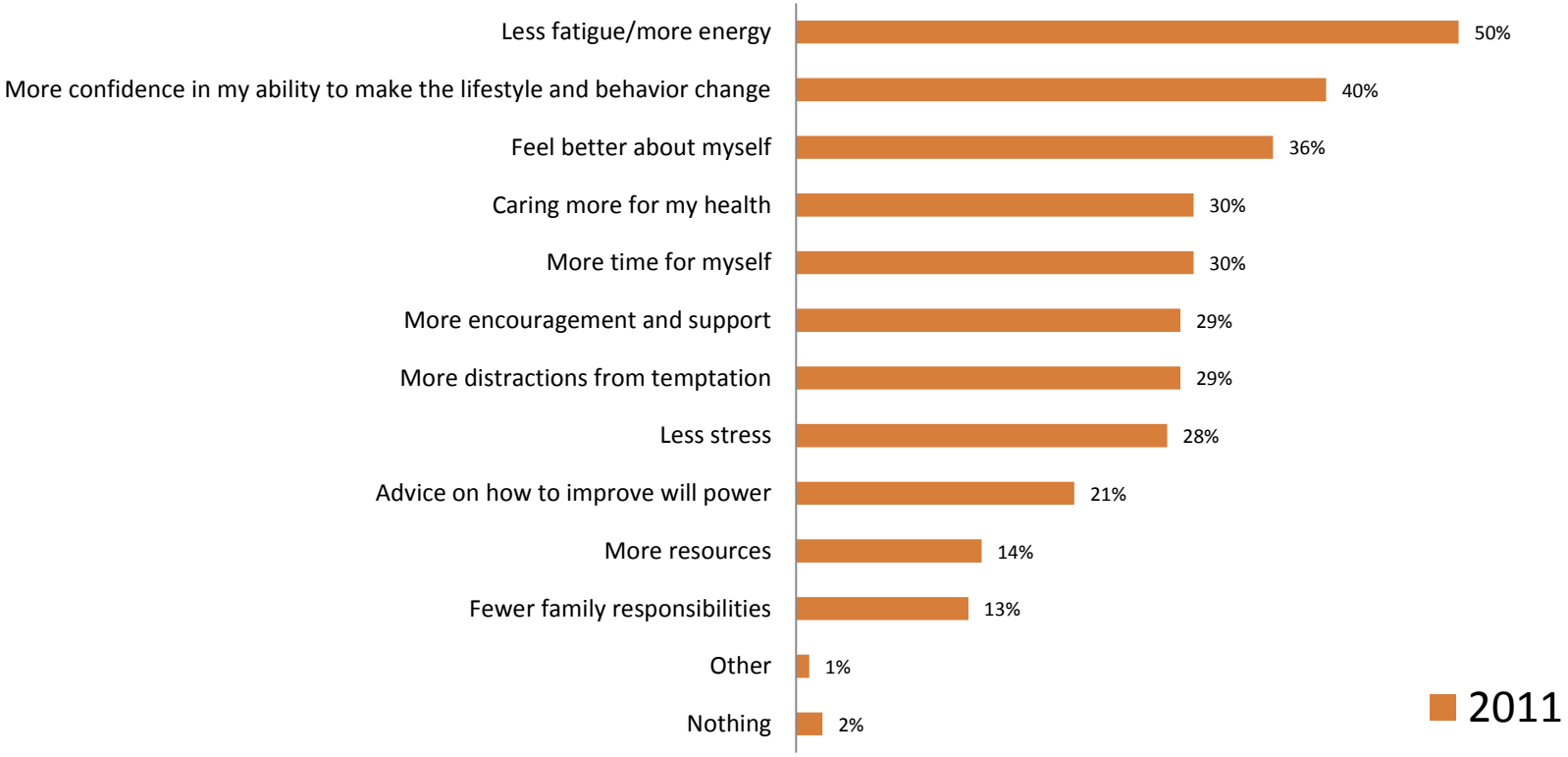



**BASE: SiA Willpower has prevented lifestyle changes 2011 (n=340)**
**Q7050** Which of the following do you think would most help you improve your willpower? Please select all that apply.

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# 2011 Stress in America: Internal Barriers to Improved Willpower

For those whom willpower has prevented them from making changes, having more energy (being less tired) (50 percent) and having more confidence in their abilities (40 percent) are seen as needed to improve willpower.



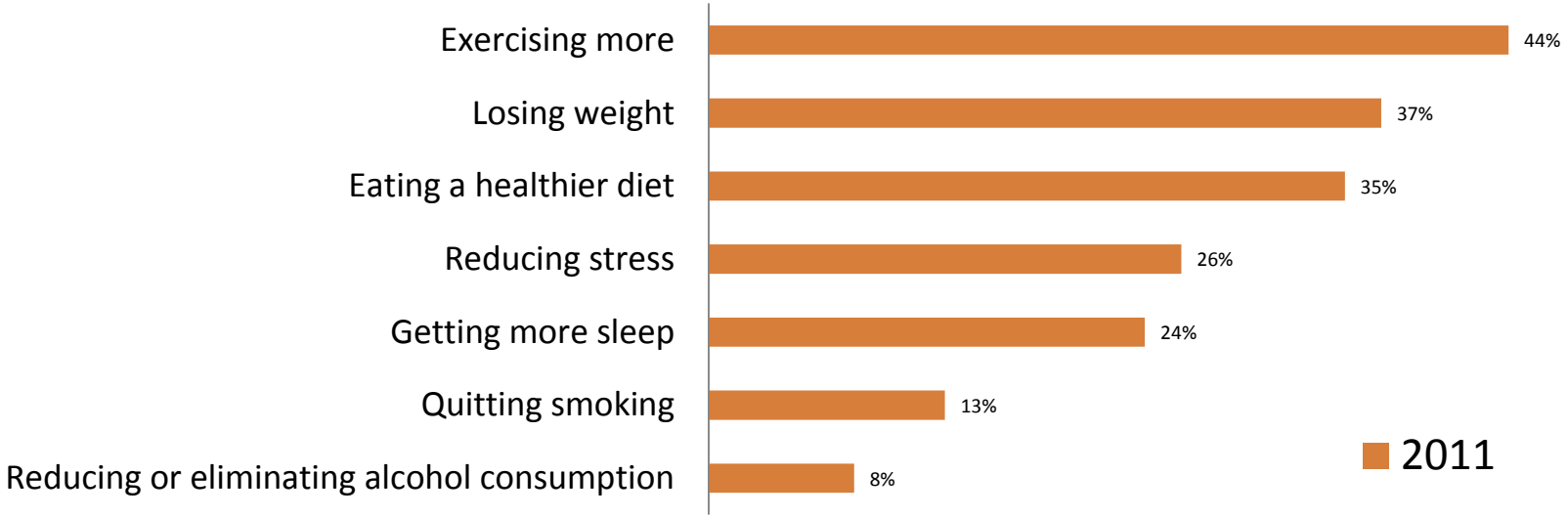

**BASE: SiA Willpower Has Prevented Lifestyle Changes 2011 (n=340)**
**Q7045** What would you need to change for your willpower to improve? Please select all that apply.

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# 2011 Stress in America: Behavior Change Recommendations

When adults were asked if they had been recommended by anyone to make any lifestyle or behavior changes in the Stress in America survey, again the most common recommendations were to exercising more (44 percent), losing weight (37 percent), and eating a healthier diet (35 percent).

**Regardless if you have decided to make these changes, has anyone recommended you do any of the following in the past 5 years?**



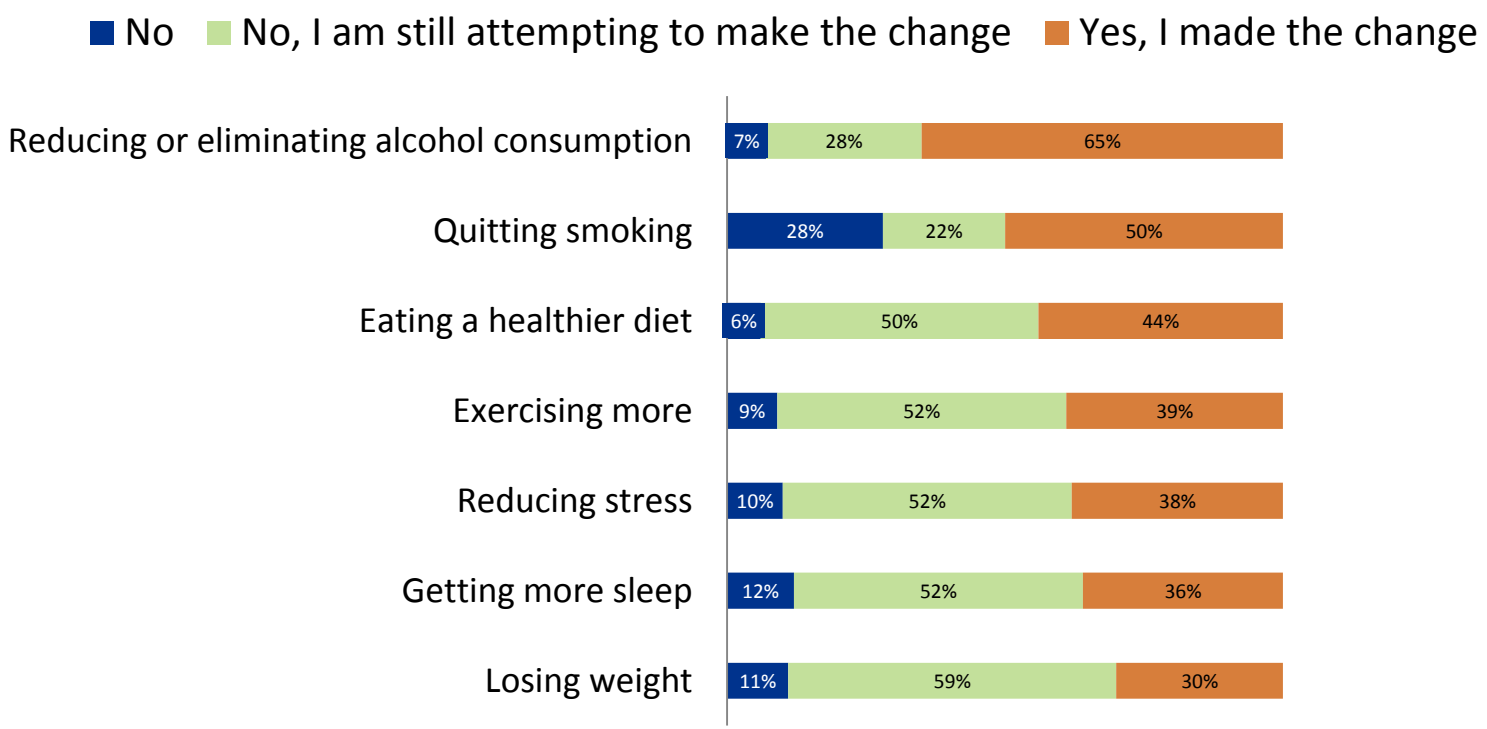

**BASE: All respondents SiA 2011 (n=1226)**
**Q7125** Regardless if you have decided to make these changes, has anyone recommended you do any of the following in the past 5 years?

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# 2011 Stress in America: Status of Change

With the exception of reducing or eliminating alcohol consumption and quitting smoking, the majority of adults that attempted to make a lifestyle or behavior change were not successful in making the change; however, a sizeable percentage report they are still attempting to make the change.

**Did you successfully make the change?**




**BASE: Decided to make a change SiA 2011 (Base Varies)**

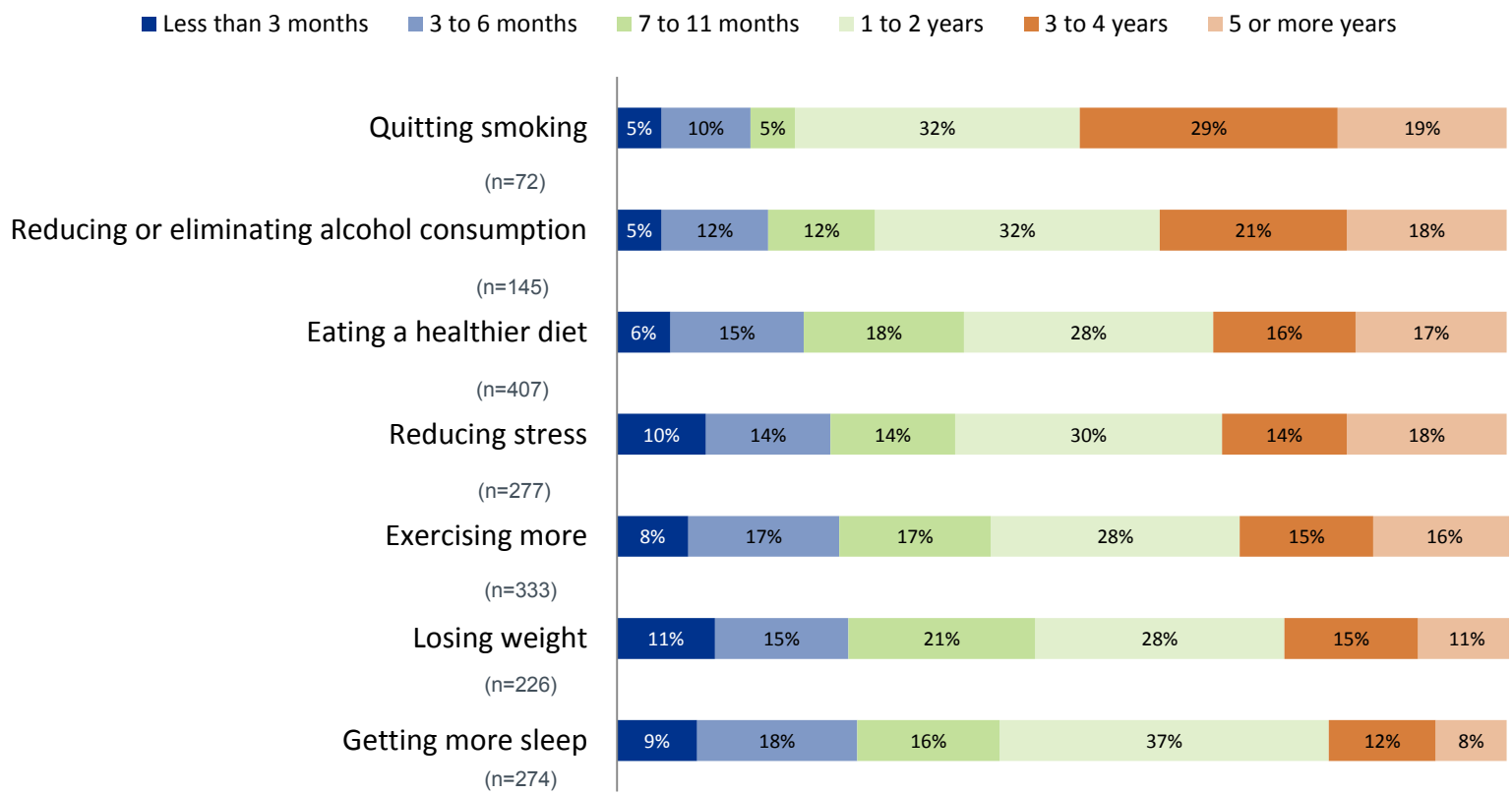
**Q7150** You mentioned you decided to make a lifestyle change. Did you successfully make the change?

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# Length of Time Goal Has Been Successfully Maintained

For those who successfully made the change, length of successfully maintaining the goal varied greatly.

**How long have you successfully maintained your goal?**

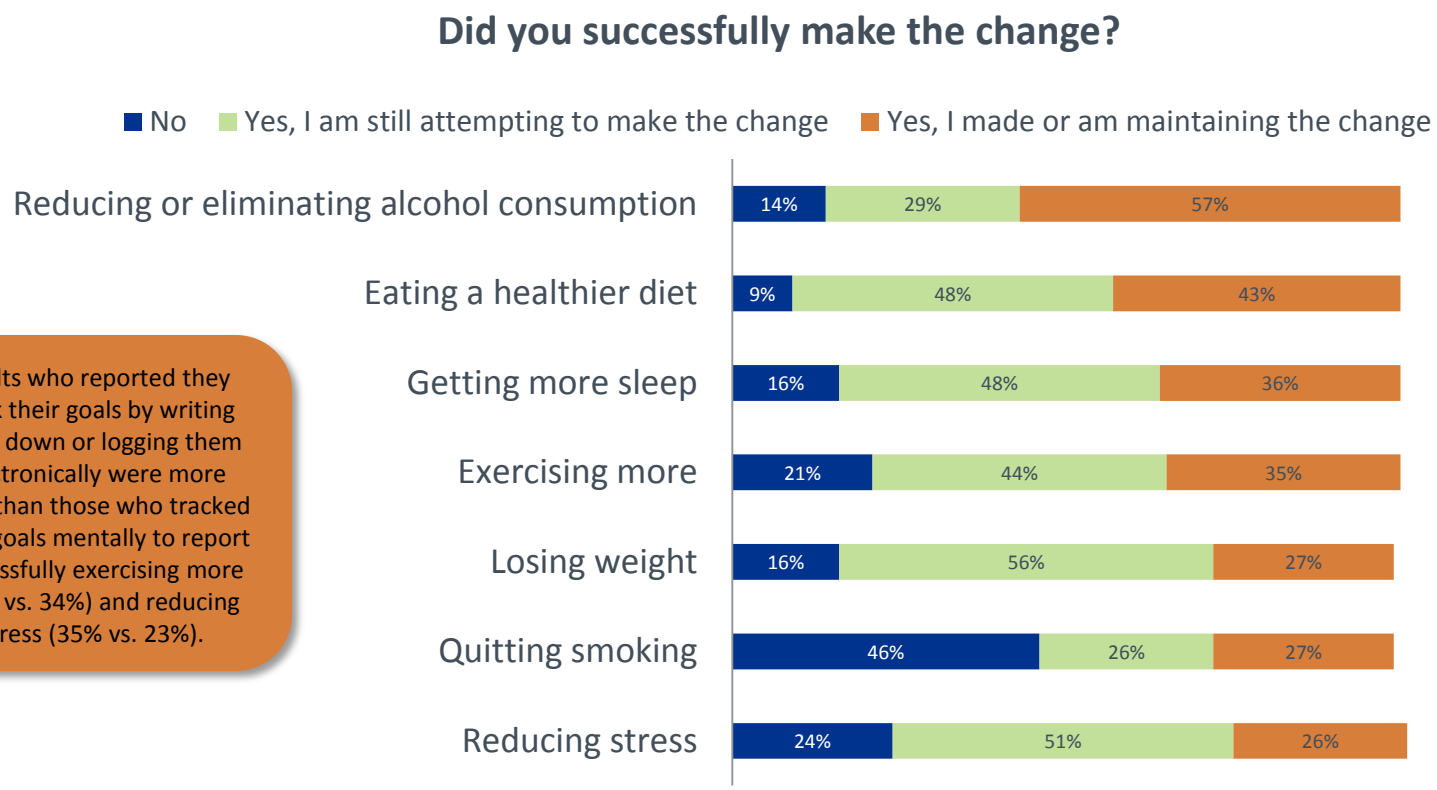



**BASE: Made the change SiA 2011 (Base Varies)**
**Q7155** How long have you successfully maintained your goal?

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# Status of Change

In the follow-up survey, adults who reported they decided to make a change or that they had received a recommendation to make a change were asked a follow-up question about the status of their change. With the exception of reducing or eliminating alcohol consumption, the majority had not made or were not maintaining the change.




Adults who reported they track their goals by writing them down or logging them electronically were more likely than those who tracked their goals mentally to report successfully exercising more (45% vs. 34%) and reducing stress (35% vs. 23%).

**BASE: Follow-up decided to make a change 2011 at Q7125 or Q7125 (Base Varies)**

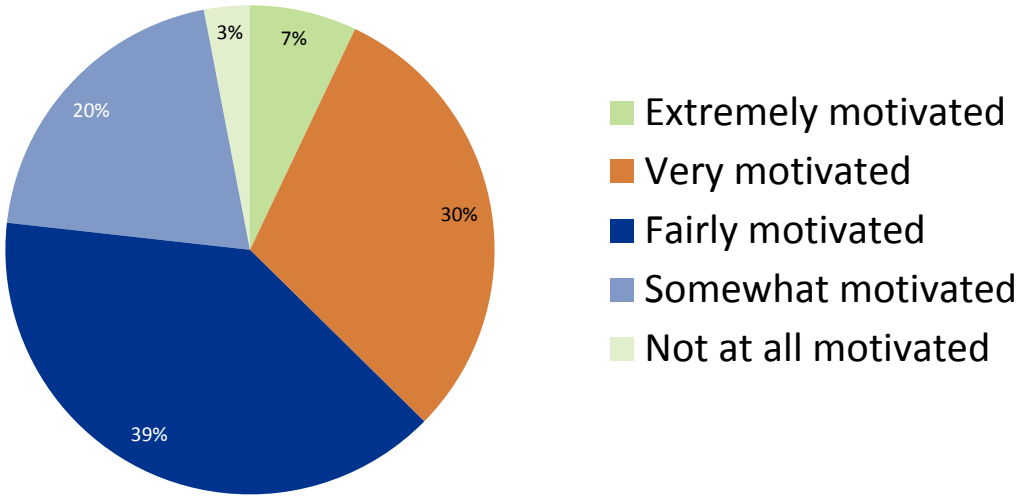
**Q615** The last time we interviewed you, you indicated you were trying to or that someone had recommended [INSERT CHANGE]. Did you successfully make the change?

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# Motivation Levels

Over one-third (37 percent) of adults making a change report they are extremely or very motivated to make lifestyle or behavior changes.

**How would you rate your level of motivation to make these changes?**



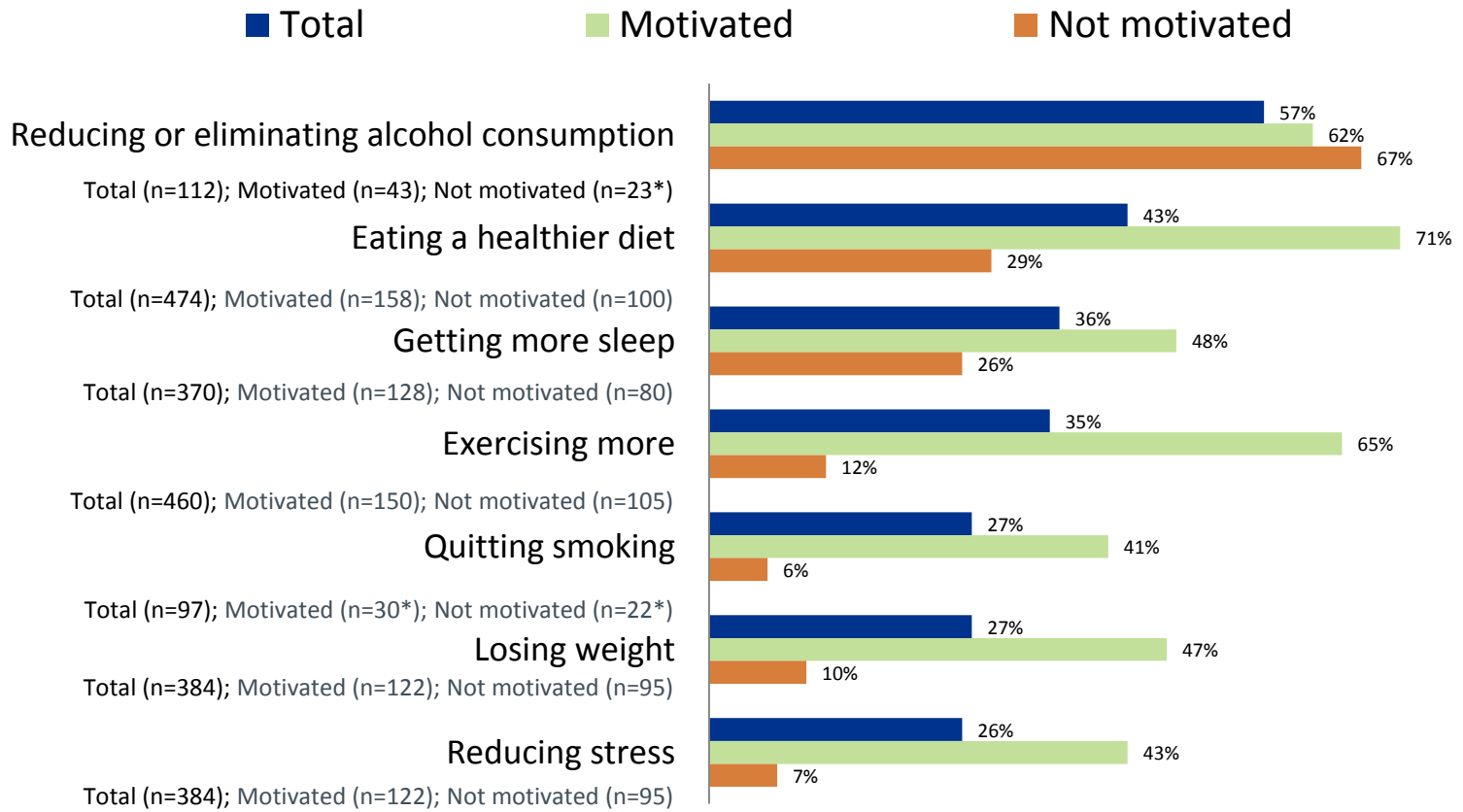

**BASE: Follow-up making a lifestyle or behavior change (n=502)**
**Q700** Thinking of the behavior and lifestyle changes you are working on, how would you rate your level of motivation to make these changes?

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# Status of Change by Motivation

Adults who report that they are extremely or very motivated to make the lifestyle or behavior change were significantly more likely than those who report that they are somewhat or not at all motivated to report success for several of the changes below.

**% Yes, I made or am maintaining the change**




***Small base**

**BASE: Follow-up decided to make a change 2011 at Q7125 or Q7125 (Base Varies)**

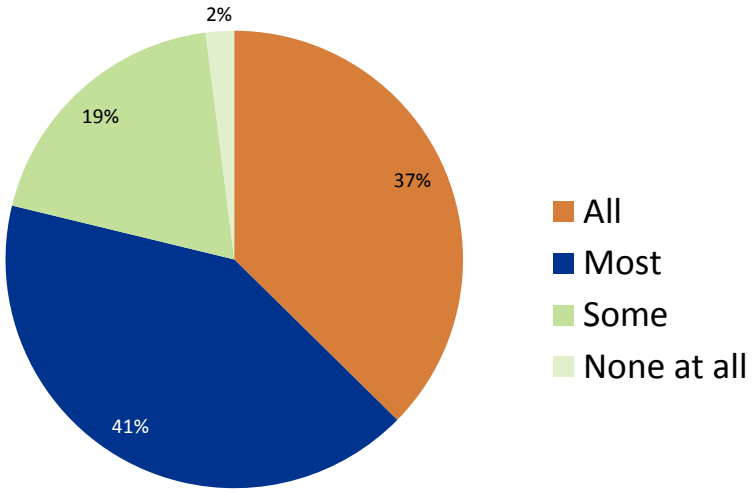
**Q615** The last time we interviewed you, you indicated you were trying to or that someone had recommended [INSERT CHANGE]. Did you successfully make the change?

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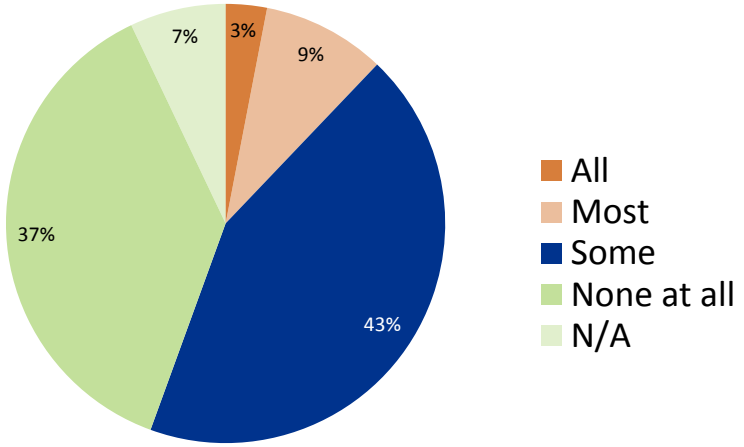
# Source of Motivation

Over three-quarters of those making changes (78 percent) report that all/most of their motivation is related to their own desire rather than being asked by other people. Conversely, 12 percent report that all/most of their motivation is related to having been asked by a family member, friend or health care provider.

**Own Desire**




**Recommendation of Others**




**BASE: Follow-up making a lifestyle or behavior change (n=502)**

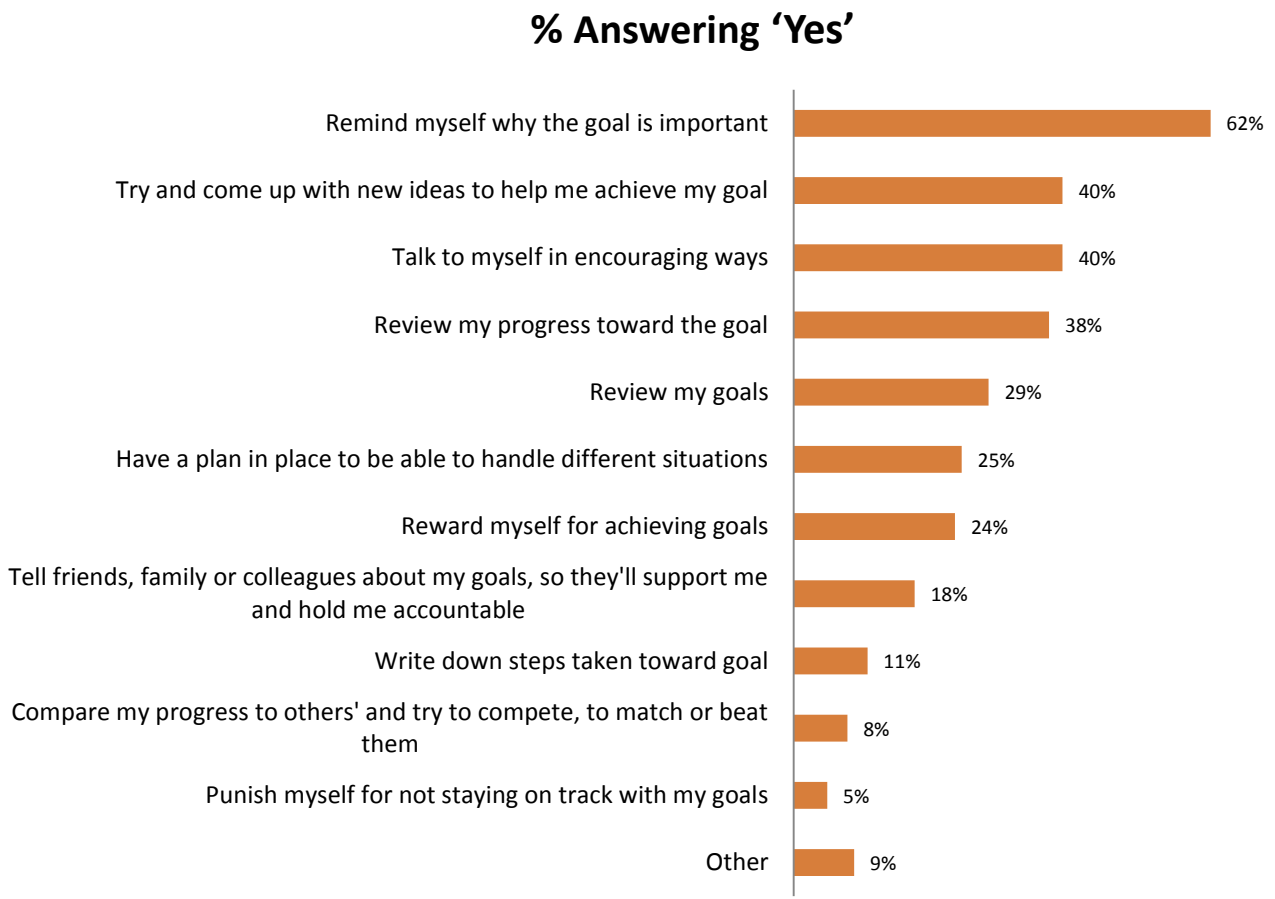
**Q710** How much of your motivation is related to your own desire to make the behavior and lifestyle changes rather than being asked by other people to make changes?

**Q715** How much of your motivation to make lifestyle and behavior changes is related to having been asked by a family member, friend or health care provider?

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# Motivation Strategies

The most common way adults making changes motivate themselves is reminding themselves of the goal. This is followed by coming up with new ideas to help achieve goals, encouraging themselves, and reviewing their progress.




**BASE: Recontact making a lifestyle or behavior change (n=502)**

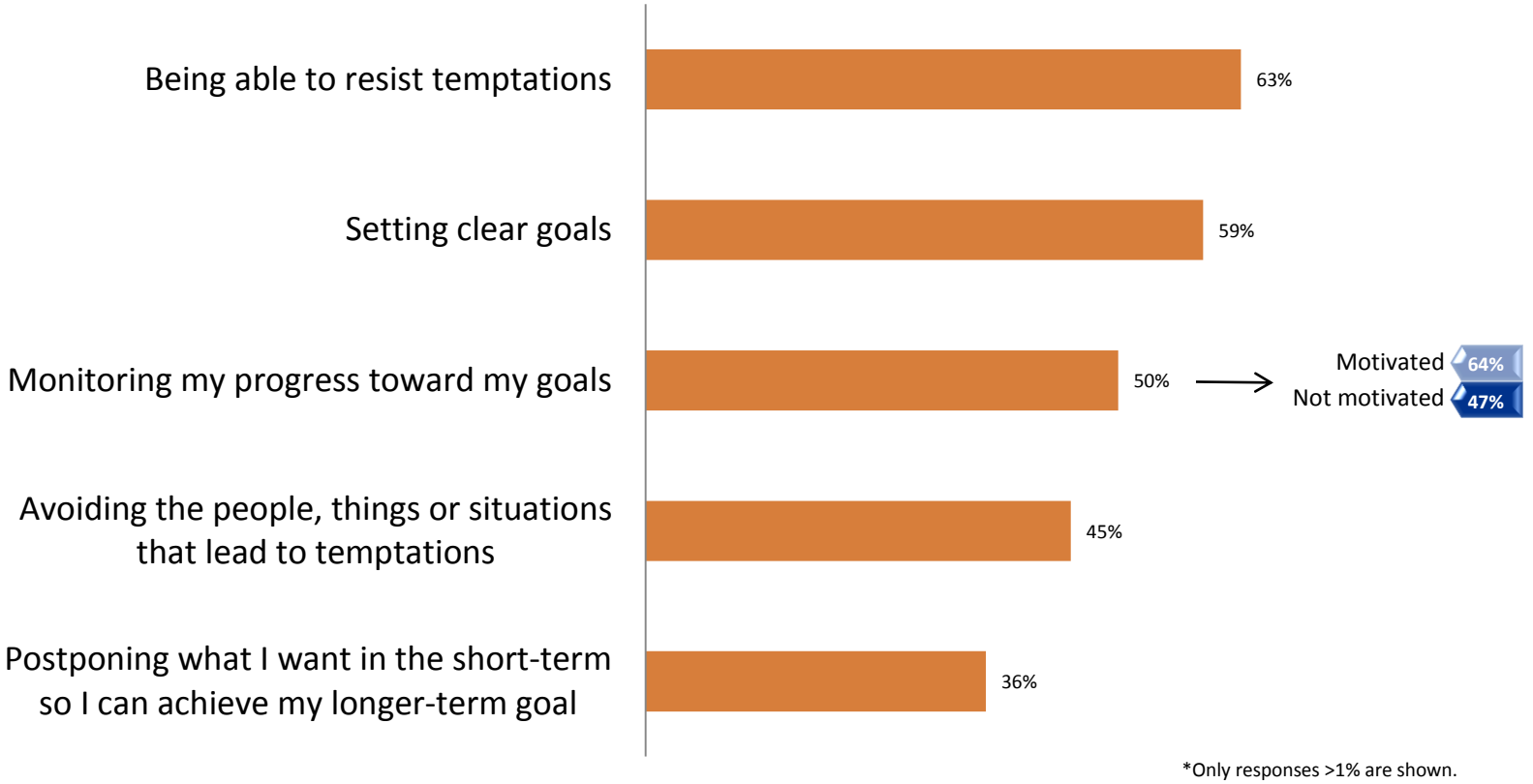
**Q720** In your everyday life, how do you motivate yourself? Please select all that apply.

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# Importance of Strategies

When asked to rate the importance of certain strategies, adults were most likely to report being able to resist temptation as the most important strategy for making changes.

**% Answering 'Extremely or Very Important'**




*Only responses >1% are shown.

**BASE: All respondents follow-up (n=566)**

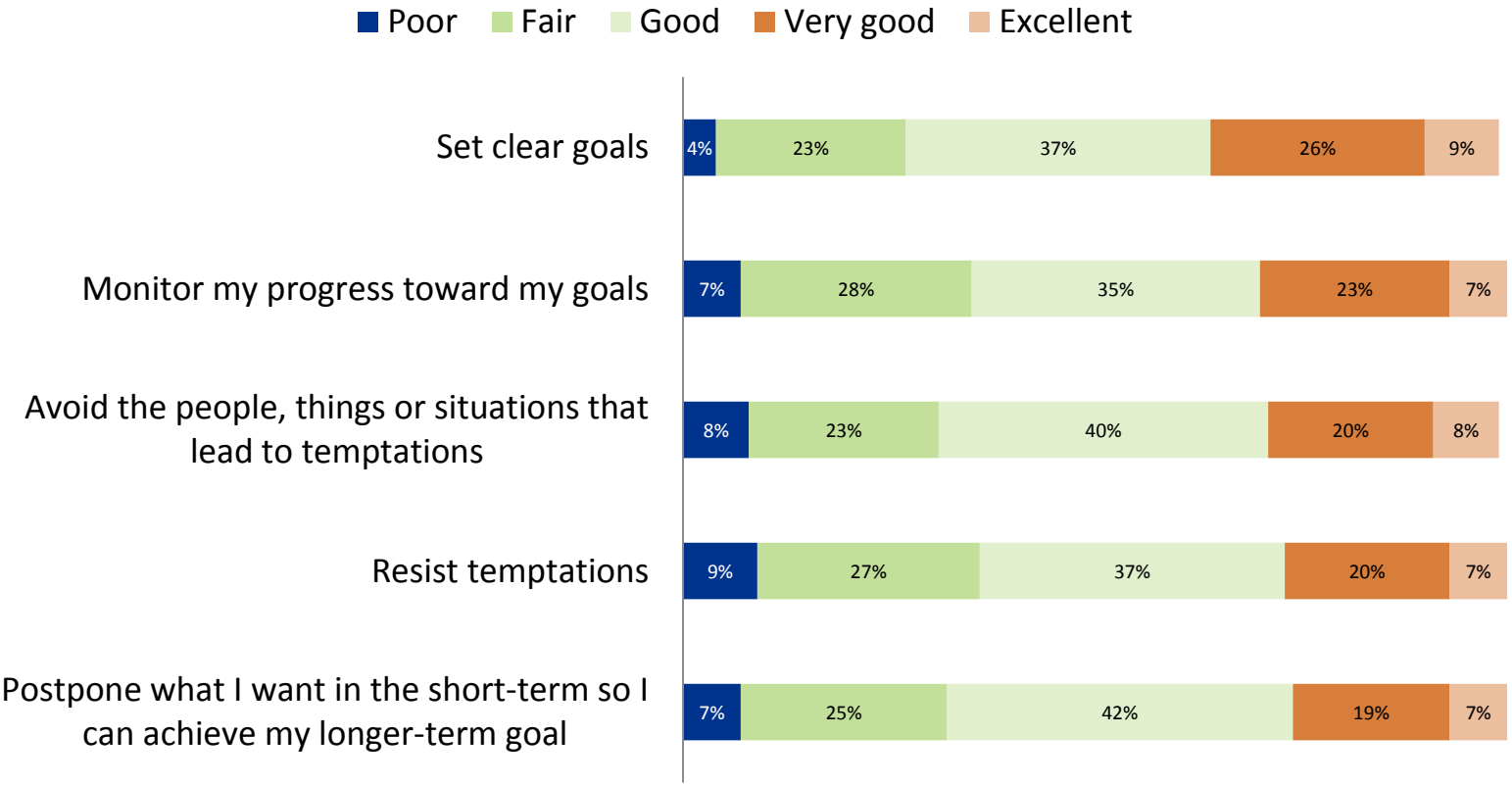
**Q725** When working to make a behavior or lifestyle change, how important do you think the following are?

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# Achievement of Strategies

Adults are most likely to report that they do a very good or excellent job setting clear goals. Fewer report success with postponing what they want in the short-term so that they can achieve their goal in the long term.

**How well do you do each of the following?**




**BASE: All respondents follow-up (n=566)**
**Q730** How well do you do each of the following?

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# Achievement of Strategies by Motivation

Adults who report that they are extremely or very motivated to make the lifestyle or behavior change are significantly more likely than those who report that they are somewhat or not at all motivated to report they are doing an excellent or very good job achieving the strategies listed below.

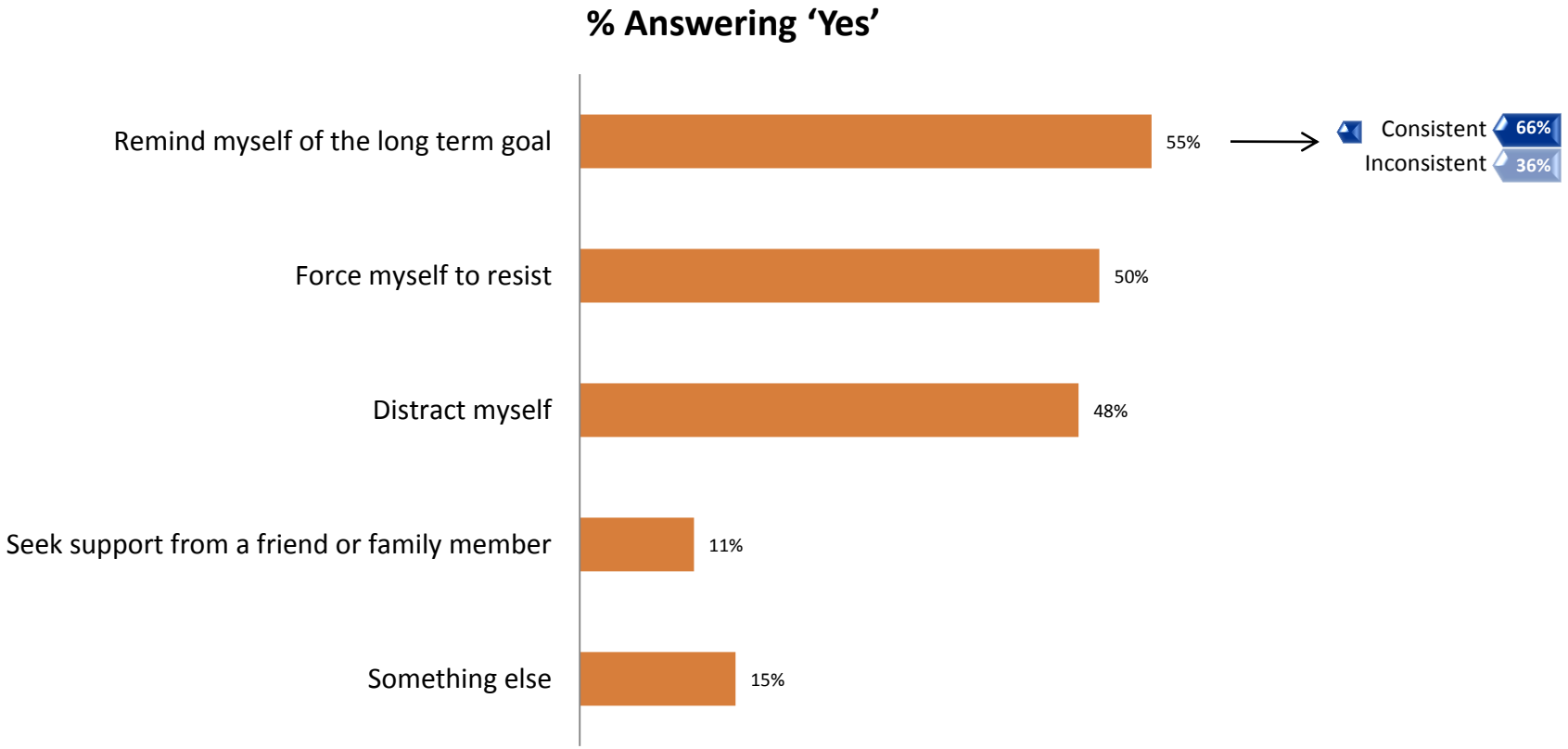



**BASE: All respondents follow-up (n=566); motivated (n=172); not motivated (n=118)**
**Q730** How well do you do each of the following?

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# Strategies Used When Wanting to Give into Temptation

The most common strategies used by adults when they feel themselves wanting to give into temptation are reminding themselves of the long term goal (55 percent), forcing themselves to resist (50 percent), and distracting themselves (48 percent). Few (11 percent) report seeking support from a friend or family members.



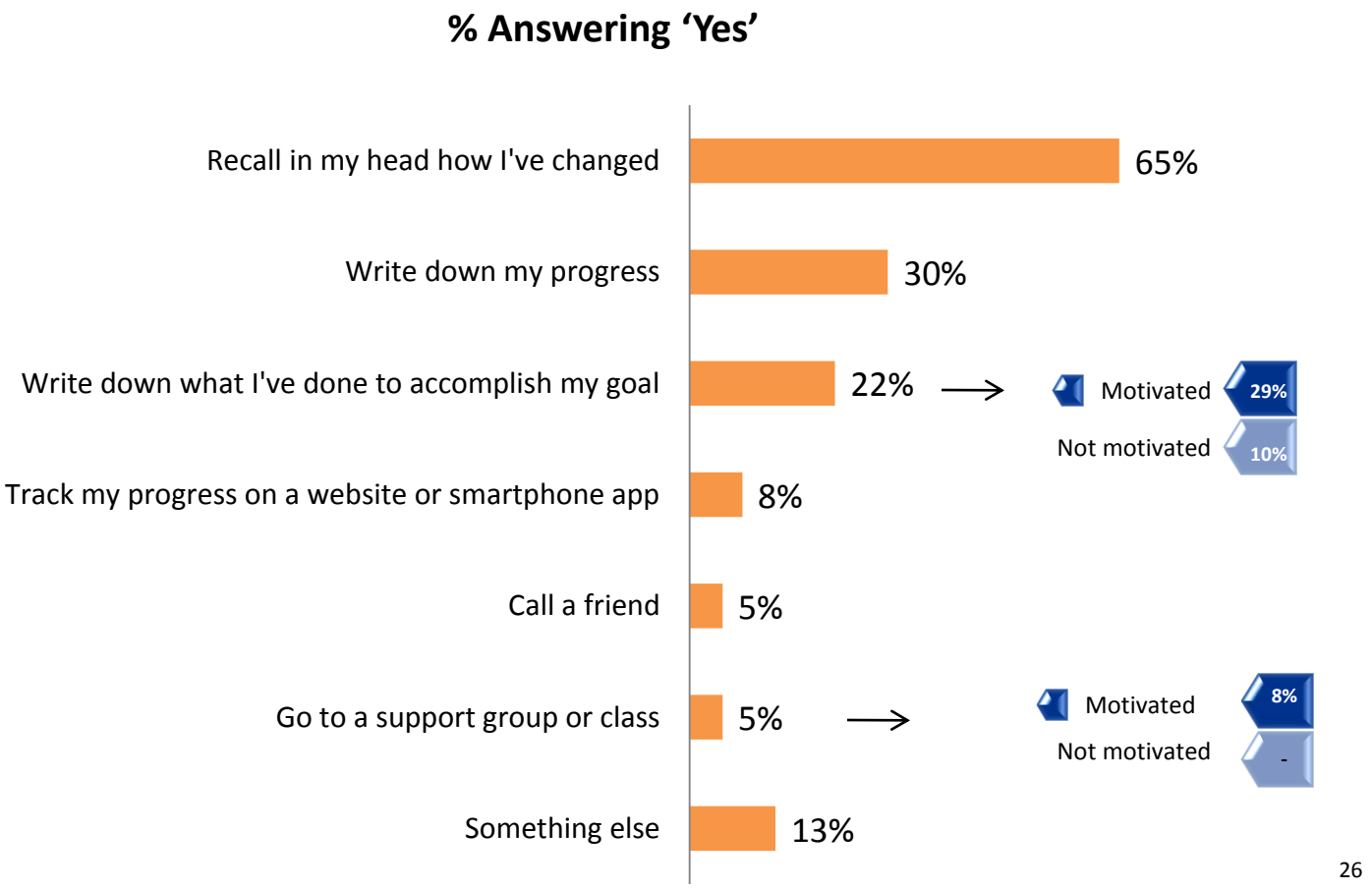

**BASE: Follow-up All respondents (n=566)**

**Q735** When you find yourself wanting to give in to temptation, which of the following do you do to stop yourself from giving in? Please select all that apply.

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# Strategies Used to Track Progress

Among adults who track their progress, when attempting to make a behavior change, most (65 percent) track their progress mentally.



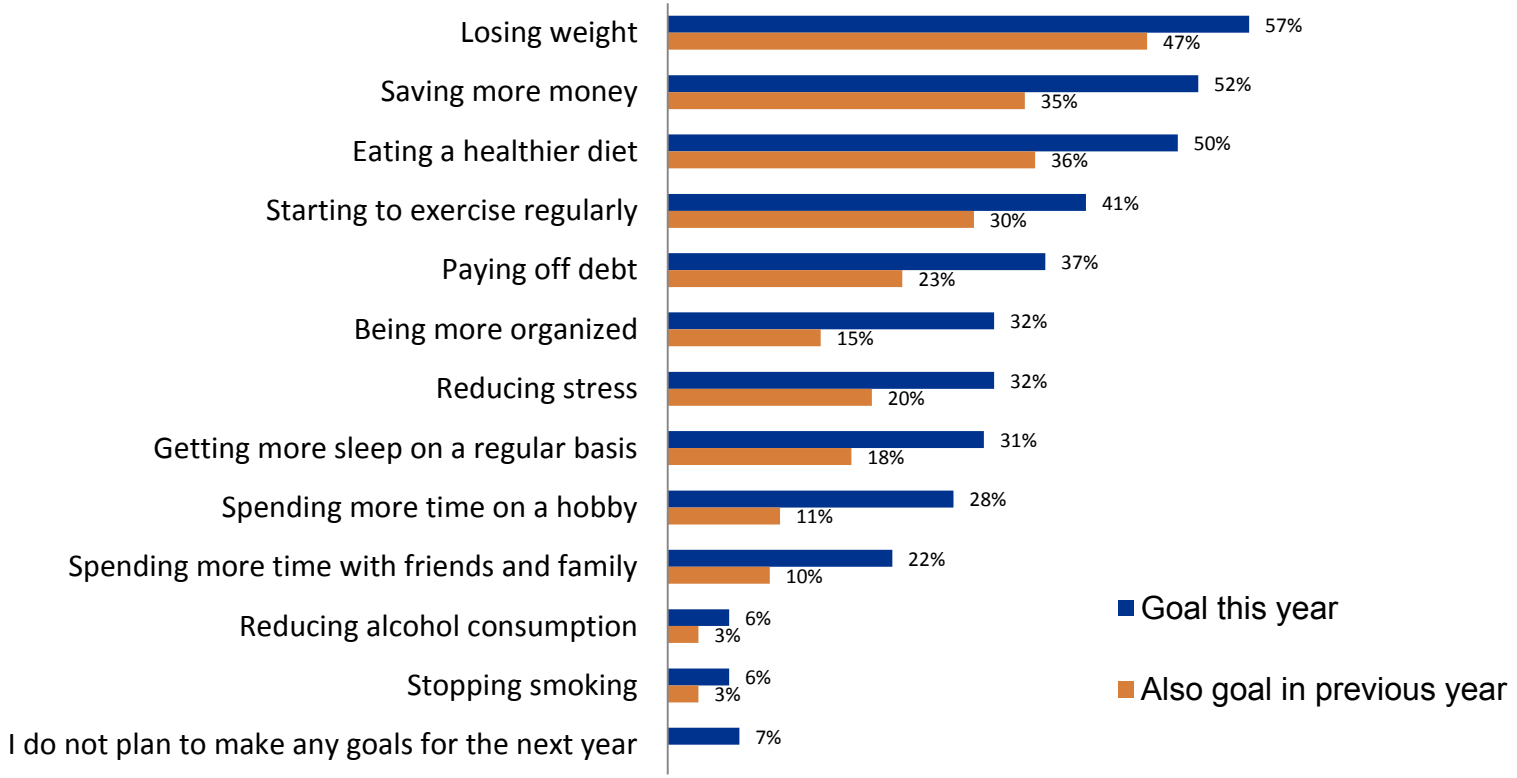

**BASE: Follow-up tracks progress (n=470)**

**Q745** How do you typically track your progress? Please select all that apply.

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# Goals for the New Year

The most commonly reported goal for next year is to lose weight. However, nearly half of adults (47 percent) who report they want to lose weight this year also had the same goal in previous years.




**BASE: All respondents follow-up (n=566)**
**Q905** Which, if any, of the following goals do you have for the next year? Please select all that apply.
**BASE: follow-up have goals for next year (Q905/1-13) (n=528)**
**Q910** And which, if any, of these goals have you had in previous years? Please select all that apply.

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# Importance of Goals

For adults who have goals for next year, nearly three-quarters say the goals are important because they want to be healthier (74 percent) and to feel better (72 percent).

**Why are these goals important to you?**




*Only responses >1% are shown.

**BASE: follow-up Have goals for next year (Q905/1-13) (n=528)**
**Q915** Why are these goals important to you? Please select all that apply.

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