

# 2015 Survey on Brain Health

---

Laura Skufca

[Lskufca@aarp.org](mailto:Lskufca@aarp.org)

October 27, 2015

<https://doi.org/10.26419/res.00114.001>

# Objectives

- To understand attitudes and behaviors about brain health as well as self-perceptions of one's own brain health.
- To learn what activities 40+ adults are currently engaging in to improve their brain health and what activities they may envision doing in the future.
- To determine what types of information 40+ adults are interested in receiving to help the Global Council on Brain Health (GCBH) identify their priority areas.

# Methodology

- An online survey fielded September 16-28, 2015 among a nationally representative sample of 1,563 adults age 40+.
- Additional interviews conducted among :
  - 362 Hispanic/Latino adults age 40+
  - 388 African-American adults age 40+
  - 308 Asian-American adults age 40+.
- The data was weighted by age, gender, race, ethnicity, employment status and income.
- The margin of error for the national sample of 1,563 adults age 40+ is +/- 2.7%.
- Percentages may not equal 100% due to rounding.

# Summary of Key Findings

- Virtually all adults age 40+ believe maintaining or improving brain health is important. Therefore, there is a great deal of interest in receiving information about brain health. The highest levels of interest are seen with regard to how diet, sleep, and mental exercises (games, puzzles, or other activities) are related to brain health. A lesser percentage are interested in receiving information on how medications and supplements are related to brain health.
- Three-quarters of adults age 40+ are concerned about their brain health declining in the future.
- Women tend to place a higher importance on brain health than men. They are also more concerned about their own brain health declining in the future and would be more motivated to engage in brain healthy behaviors.
- African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino adults place a higher importance on brain health relative to the general population. However, African-American/Blacks are less likely to engage in brain healthy activities such as exercise and eating a healthy diet.
- Most adults have not noticed any change in their mental abilities; however, one-third of 40+ adults say their ability to remember things has decreased. This figure rises to 45% among seniors (age 65+) .
- The average age in which 40+ adults noticed a decline in their ability to remember things was 55 years old.

# Summary of Key Findings

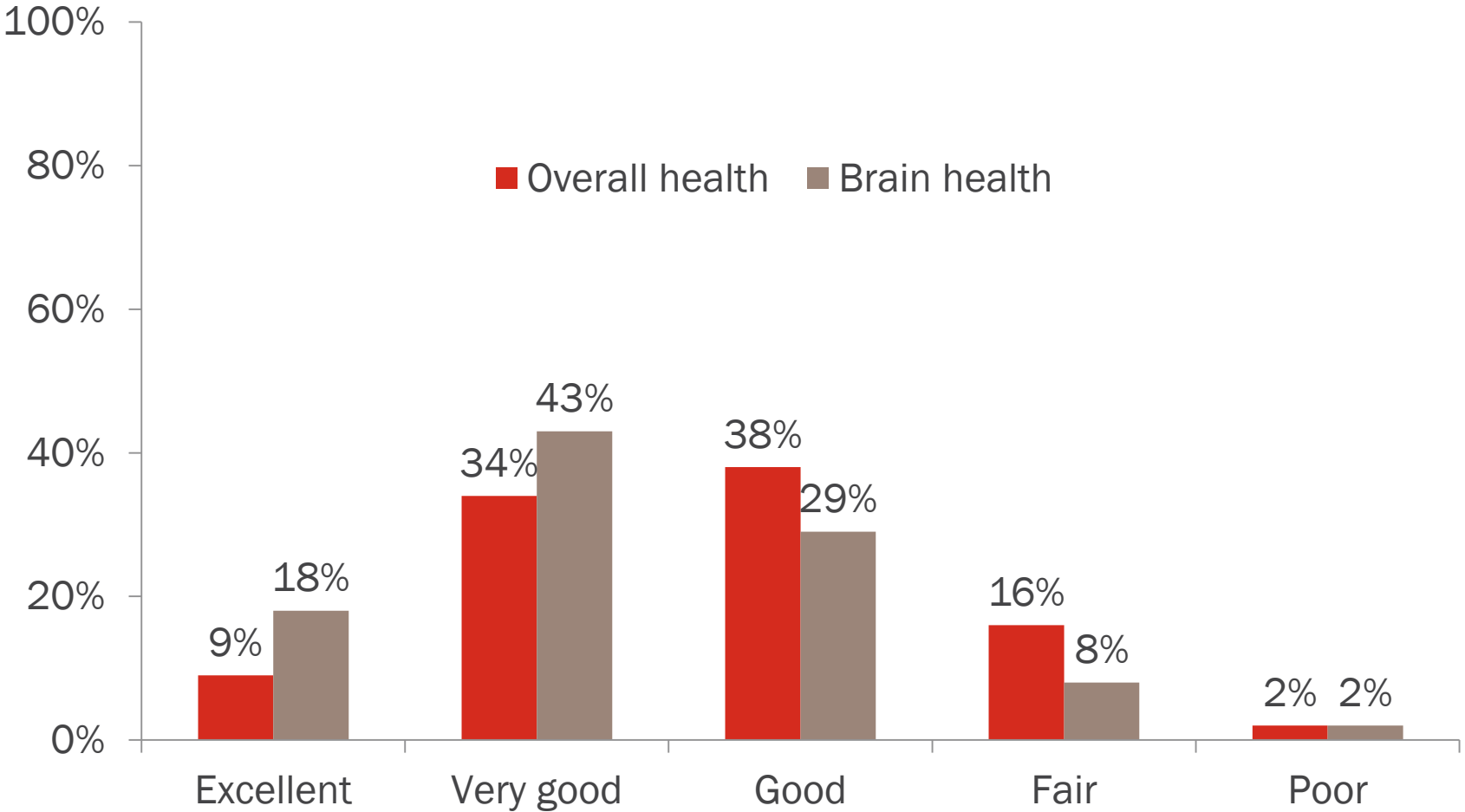
- A wide variety of activities are seen as important to brain health. Sleep, diet, exercise, managing stress and reading are perceived as *very important* by at least six in ten adults. However, when asked what activity is most important for brain health, the most commonly reported activity is challenging the mind with games/puzzles. These findings hold across demographic groups although the intensity of importance is higher among African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino adults.
- Four in five adults say they engage in activities that they think are good for their brain health. Among those who do not do things for their brain health, the most common reason is a lack of time.
- A majority of adults engage in the following activities: Socialize with friends/family, read, get adequate sleep, eat a healthy diet, exercise, take vitamins/supplements, and challenge the mind with games, puzzles, or other activities. When asked which of these activities they engage in because they think its good for their brain, challenging the mind is the most commonly reported activity.
- While brain health is *very important* to adults, many are not engaging in well-documented brain healthy activities. For example, almost all adults believe exercise (97%) and diet (96%) is important but only 56% currently exercise or eat a healthy diet.

# Summary of Key Findings

- The most influential situations that would encourage adults to engage in brain healthy activities are things that happen to them personally (e.g., experiencing a major illness or disease, personally noticing decline, etc.).
- Most adults say they are at least somewhat familiar with the effect nutrition, exercise, and sleep has on brain health. However, intensity is lacking with only about one-third *very familiar*. A lesser percentage are familiar with the effect medications, anesthesia, and hospitalization may have on brain health. Seniors and women report higher levels of familiarity than men and those age 40-49.
- Health care providers and family/friends are the most common sources of information when it comes to brain health. This trend is often seen when it comes to any health-related issue.
- Compared to the general population, African American/Black adults are even more likely to turn to their health care provider for information whereas Hispanic/Latino adults are more likely to turn to their family or friends.

# Perceptions of Brain Health

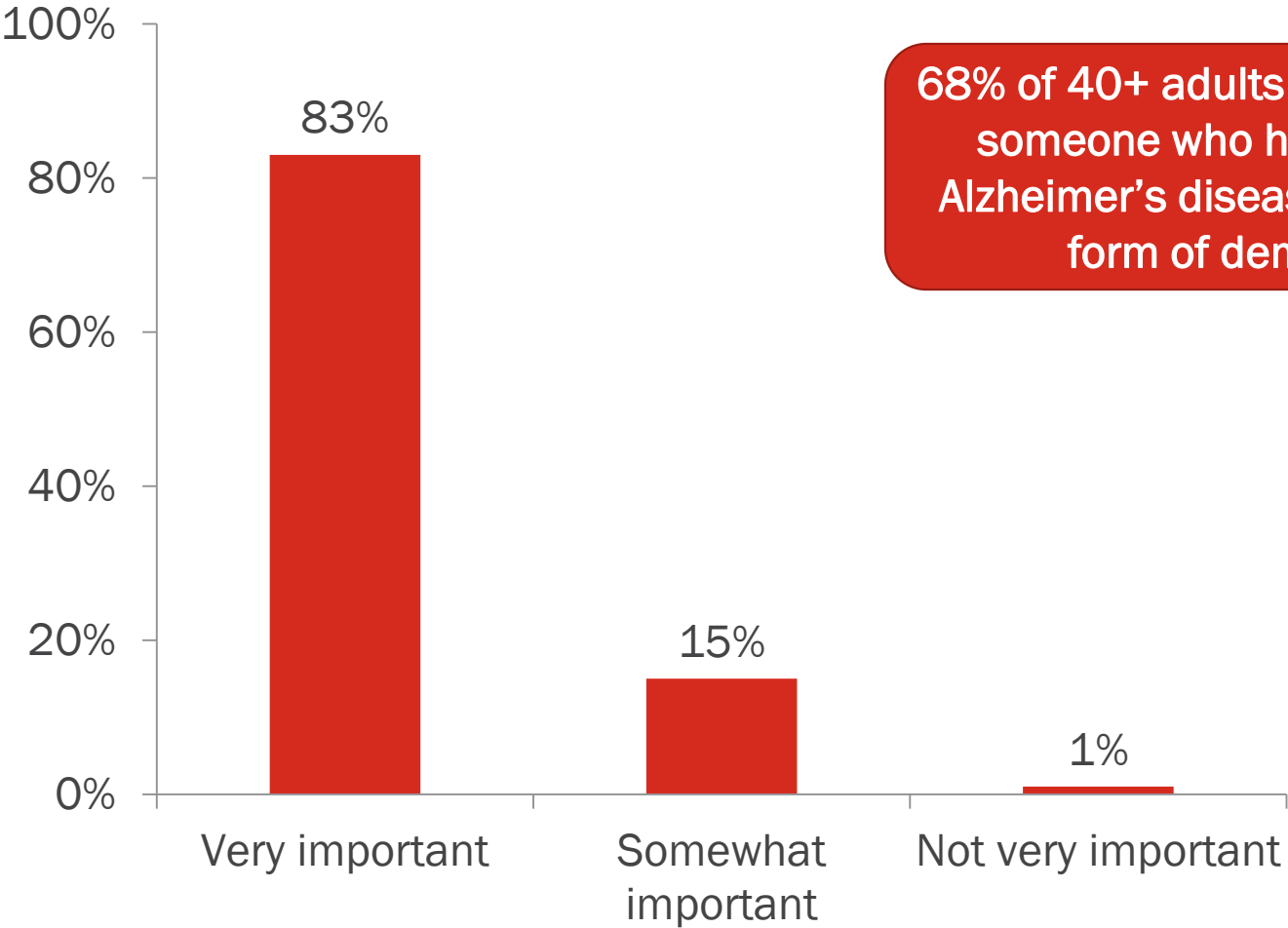
Ratings of brain health are higher than ratings of overall health. Six in 10 (61%) say their brain health is excellent or very good but only four in 10 (43%) say their overall health is excellent or very good.



Q2: Specifically, how would you rate your overall health?  
Q3: Getting more specific, how would you rate your brain health or mental sharpness?



# Nearly all adults (98%) feel it is important to maintain or improve brain health.

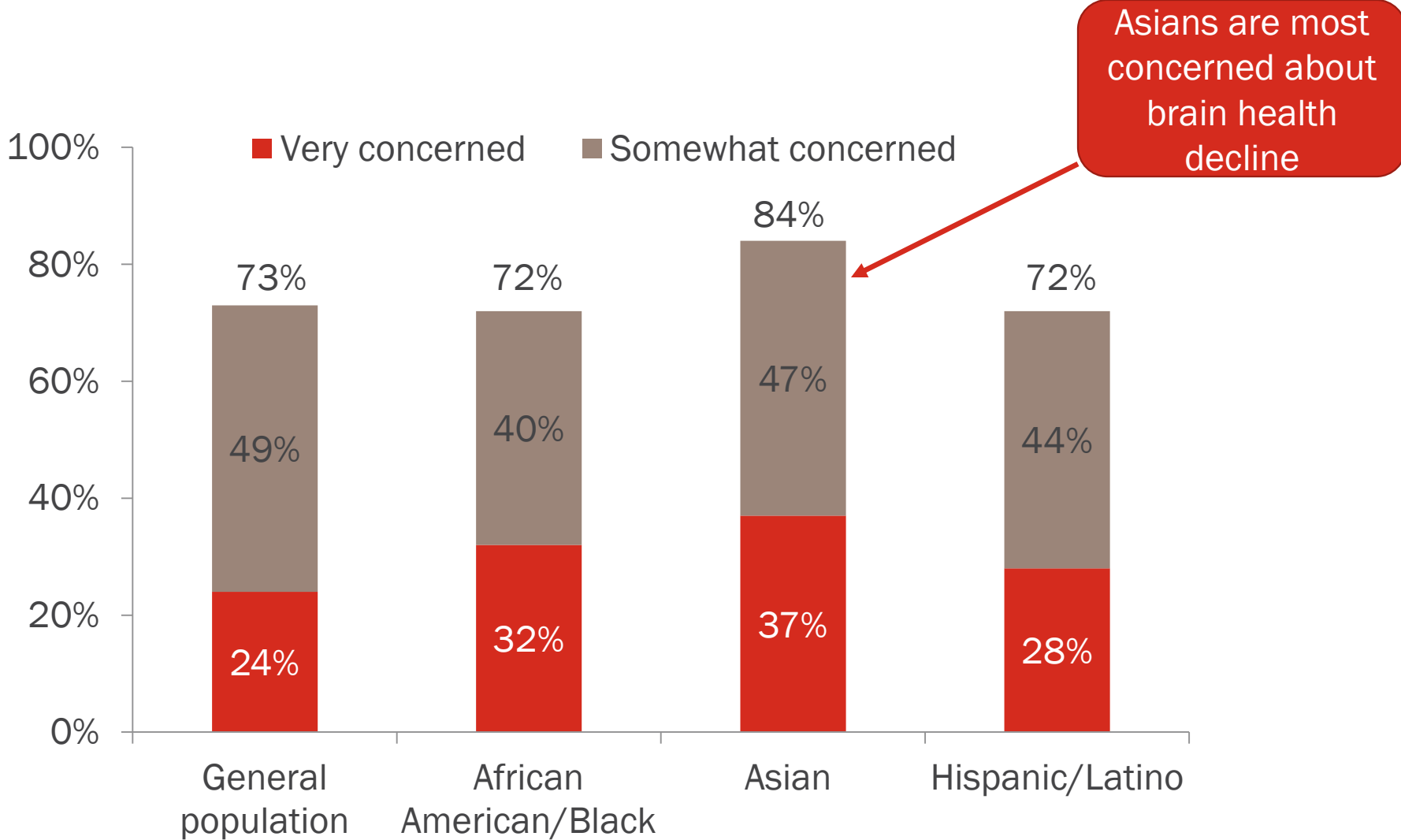


68% of 40+ adults say they know someone who has, or had, Alzheimer's disease or another form of dementia.

Q4: How important do you think it is to maintain or improve your brain health?

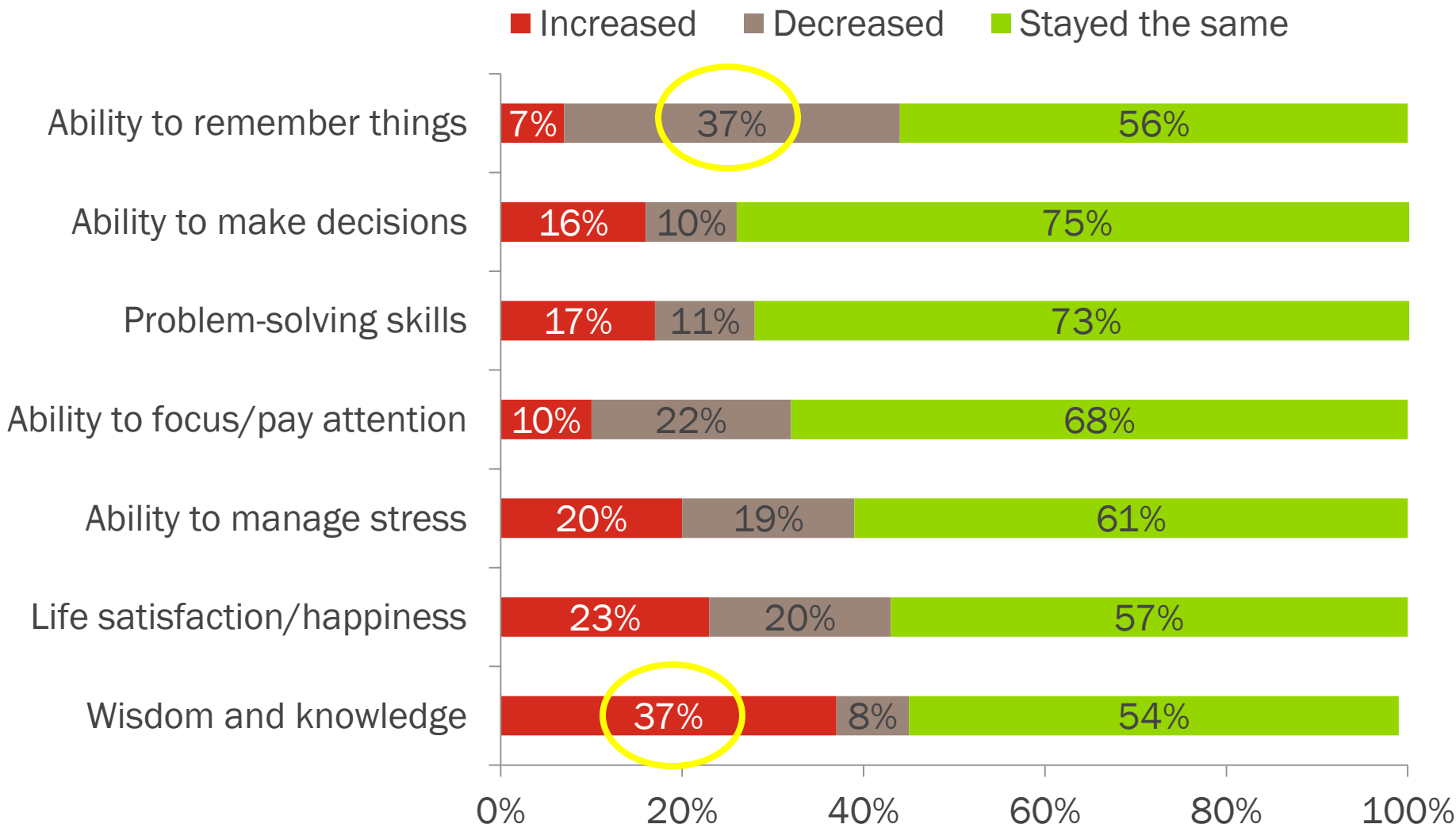
Q6: Do you know someone who has, or had, dementia such as Alzheimer's disease or another condition causing cognitive decline?

# Three in four adults are concerned about their brain health declining in the future.



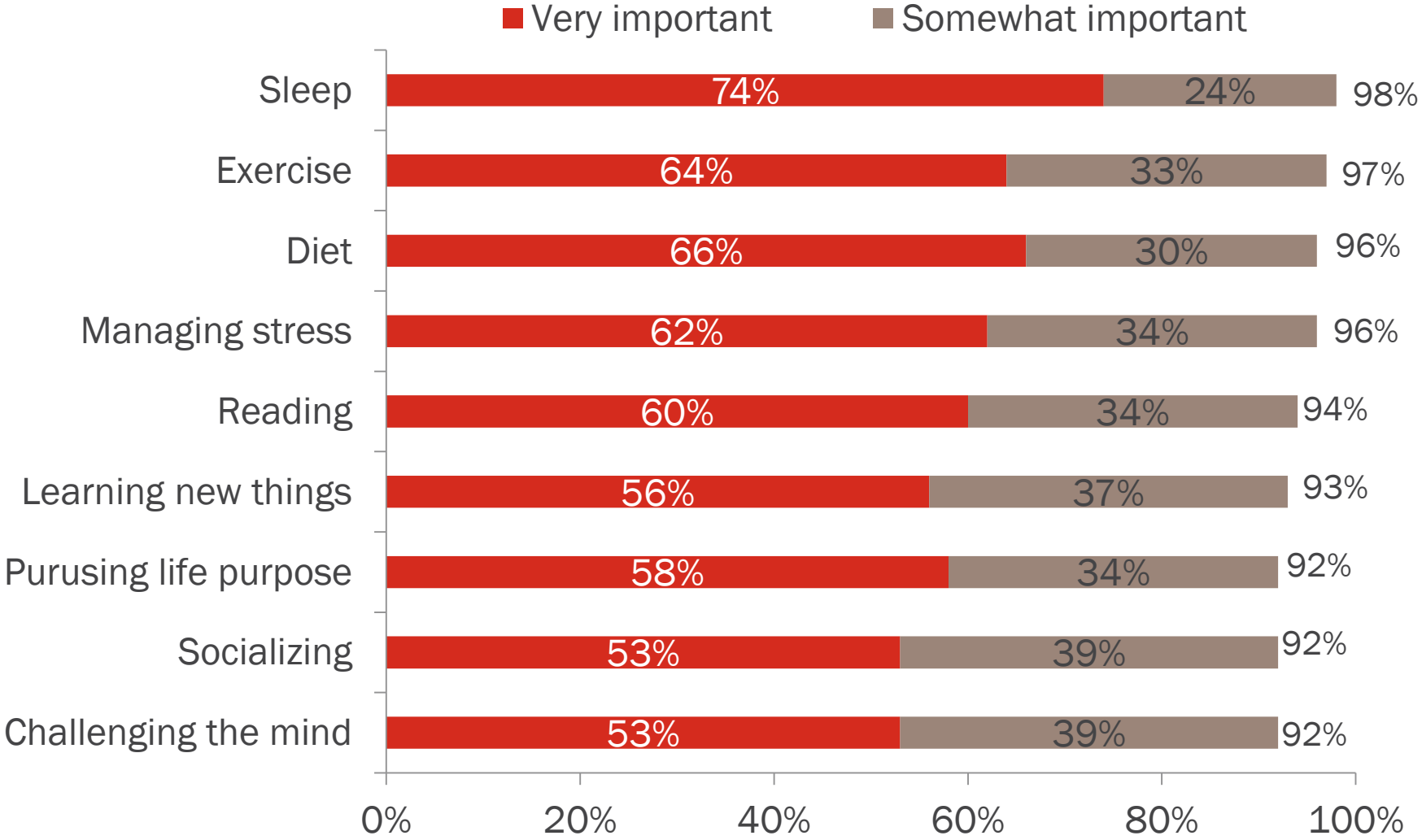
Q5: How concerned are you, if at all, about your brain health declining in the future?

Most adults say their mental capacities have stayed the same but more than one-third say their ability to remember things has decreased. Over one-third also say their wisdom and knowledge has increased.



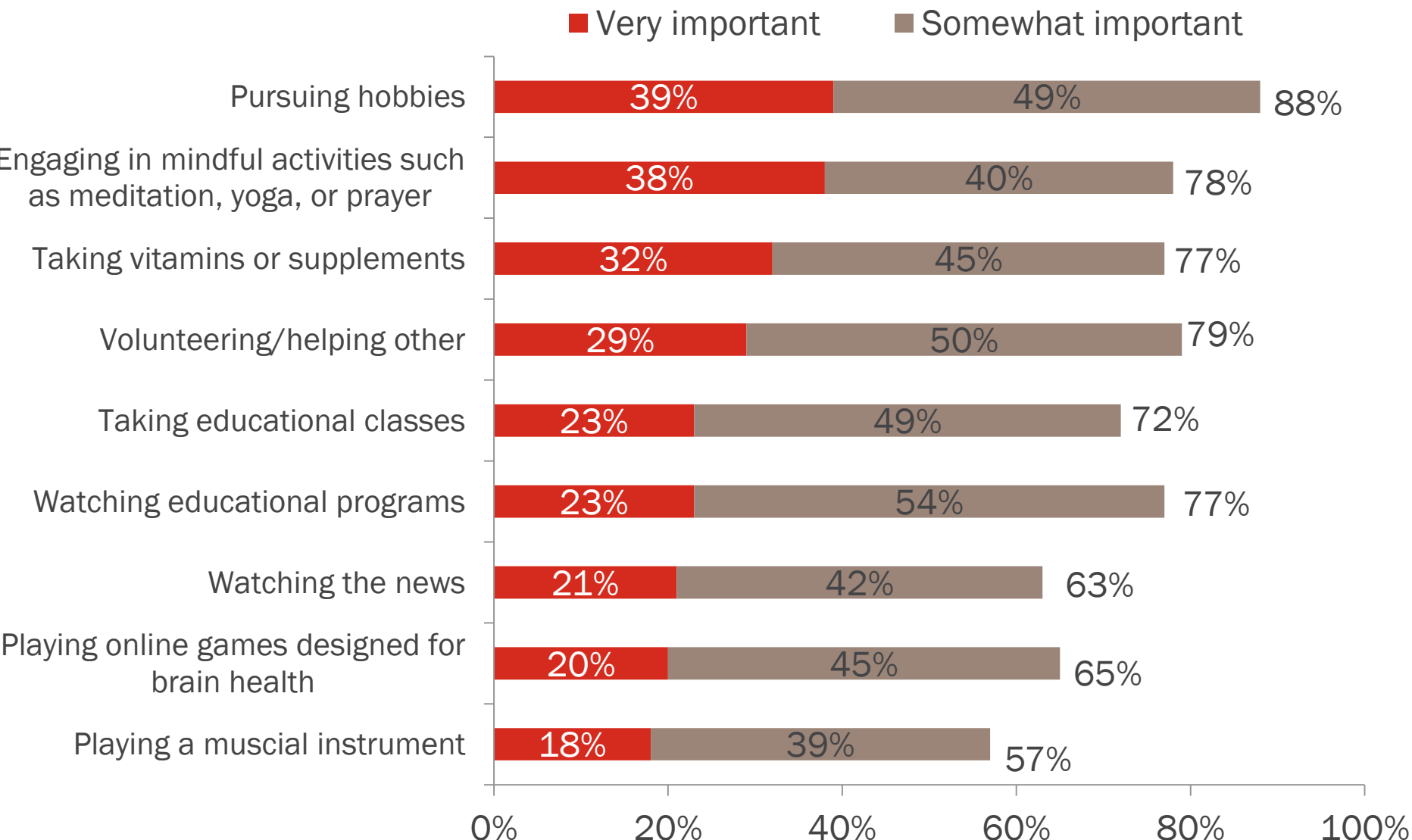
Q7: In the past five years, has the following increased, decreased or stayed the same?

Three-quarters of adults believe that sleep is very important to brain health in addition to many other activities.



Q8: How important do you think each of the following are to maintaining or improving brain health?

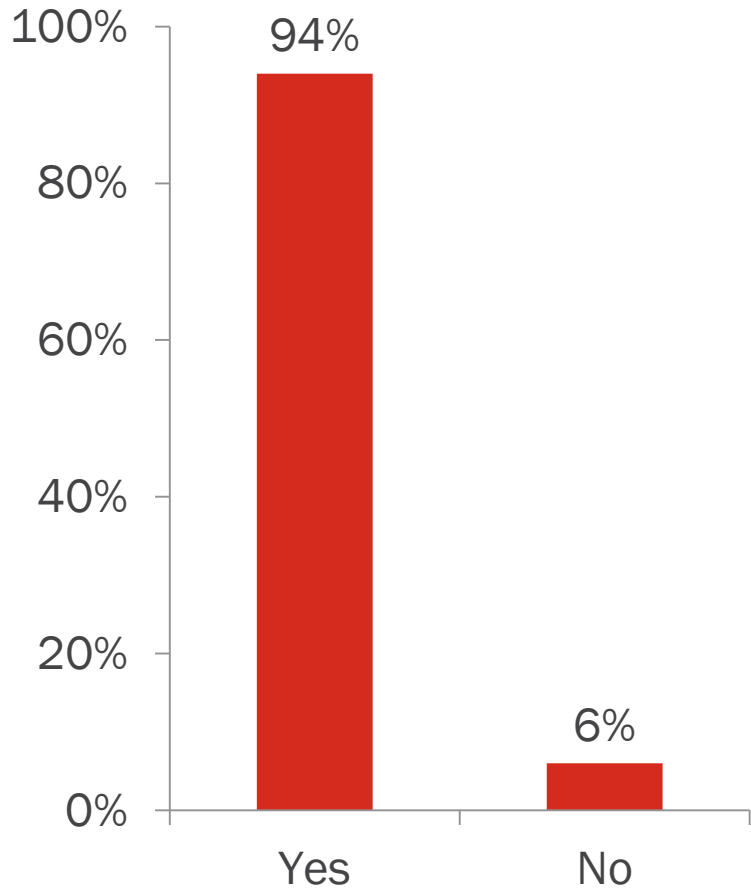
While intensity is less strong, a majority of adults find the following activities at least somewhat important.



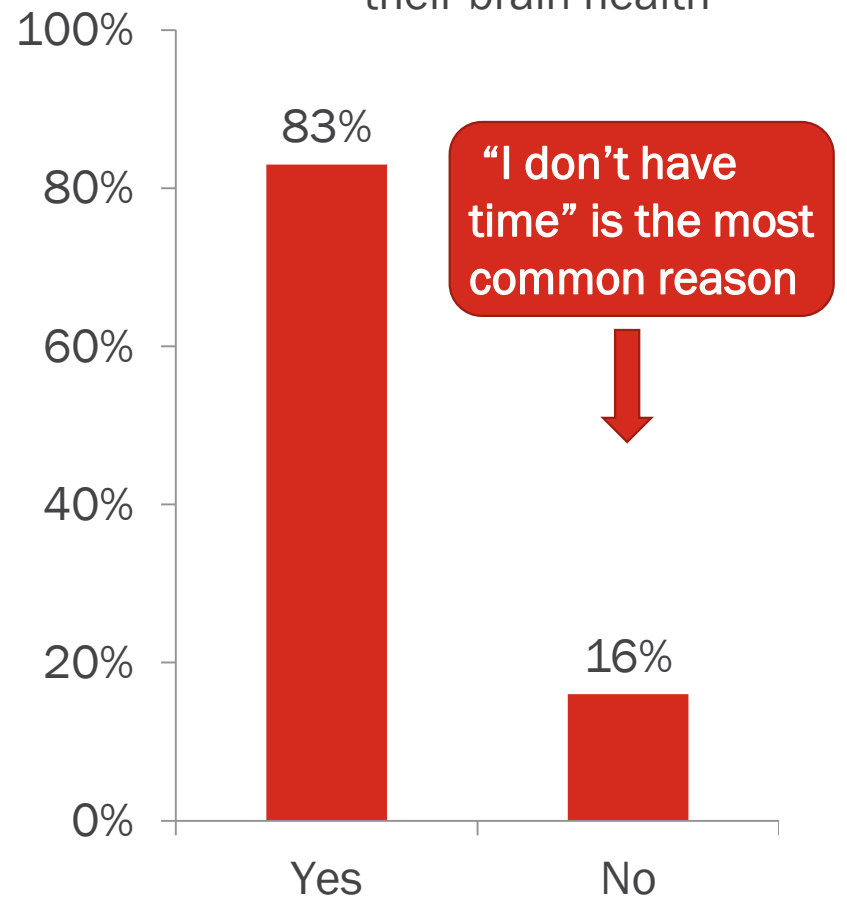
Q8: How important do you think each of the following are to maintaining or improving brain health?

Over nine in 10 adults believe brain health can be improved, and just over eight in 10 say they engage in activities that are good for their brain.

% who believe brain health can be improved



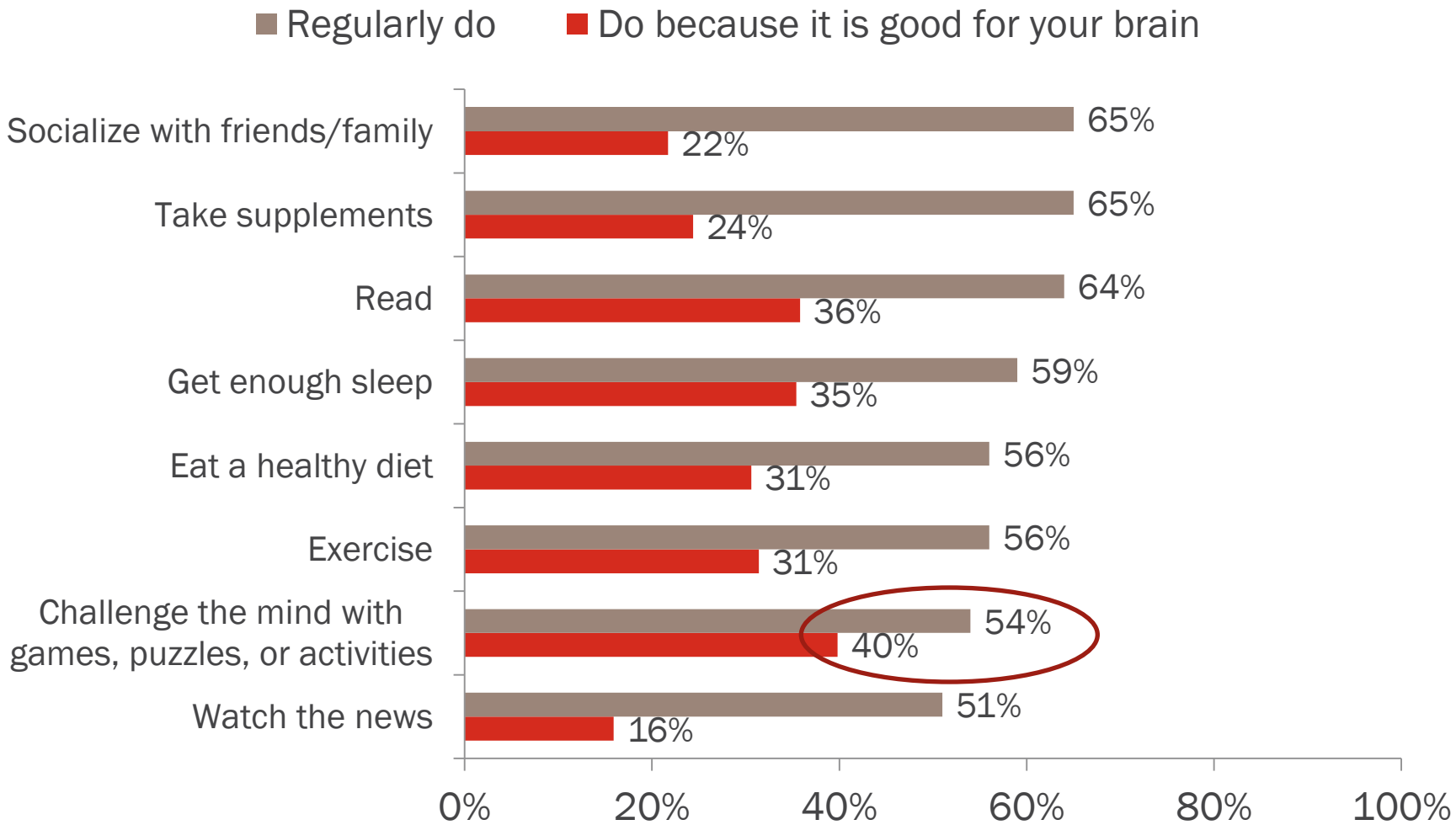
% who currently engage in activities they think are good for their brain health



Q9: Do you think there are things people can do to improve their brain health?  
Q10: Do you currently engage in any activities that you think are good for your brain health?

# Engagement in Brain Healthy Activities

Four in 10 adults challenge the mind specifically because they think it is good for their brains; a higher percentage than the other activities engaged in more often.



Q11: Which of the following activities do you regularly do?  
Q11a: Which of the following do you do because you think it's good for your brain?

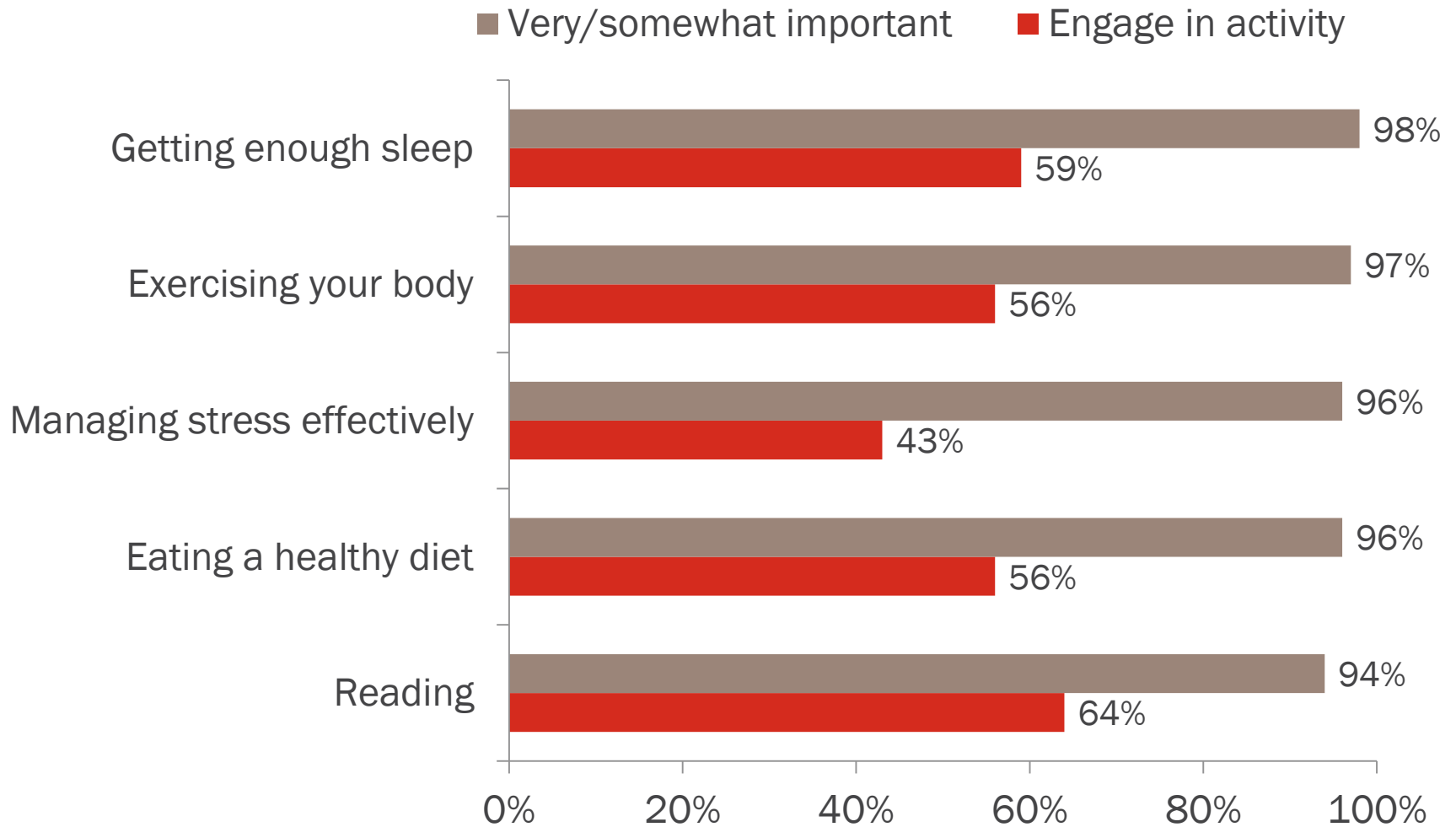


Adults engage in these activities to a lesser extent, especially for brain health.



Q11: Which of the following activities do you regularly do?  
Q11a: Which of the following do you do because you think it's good for your brain?

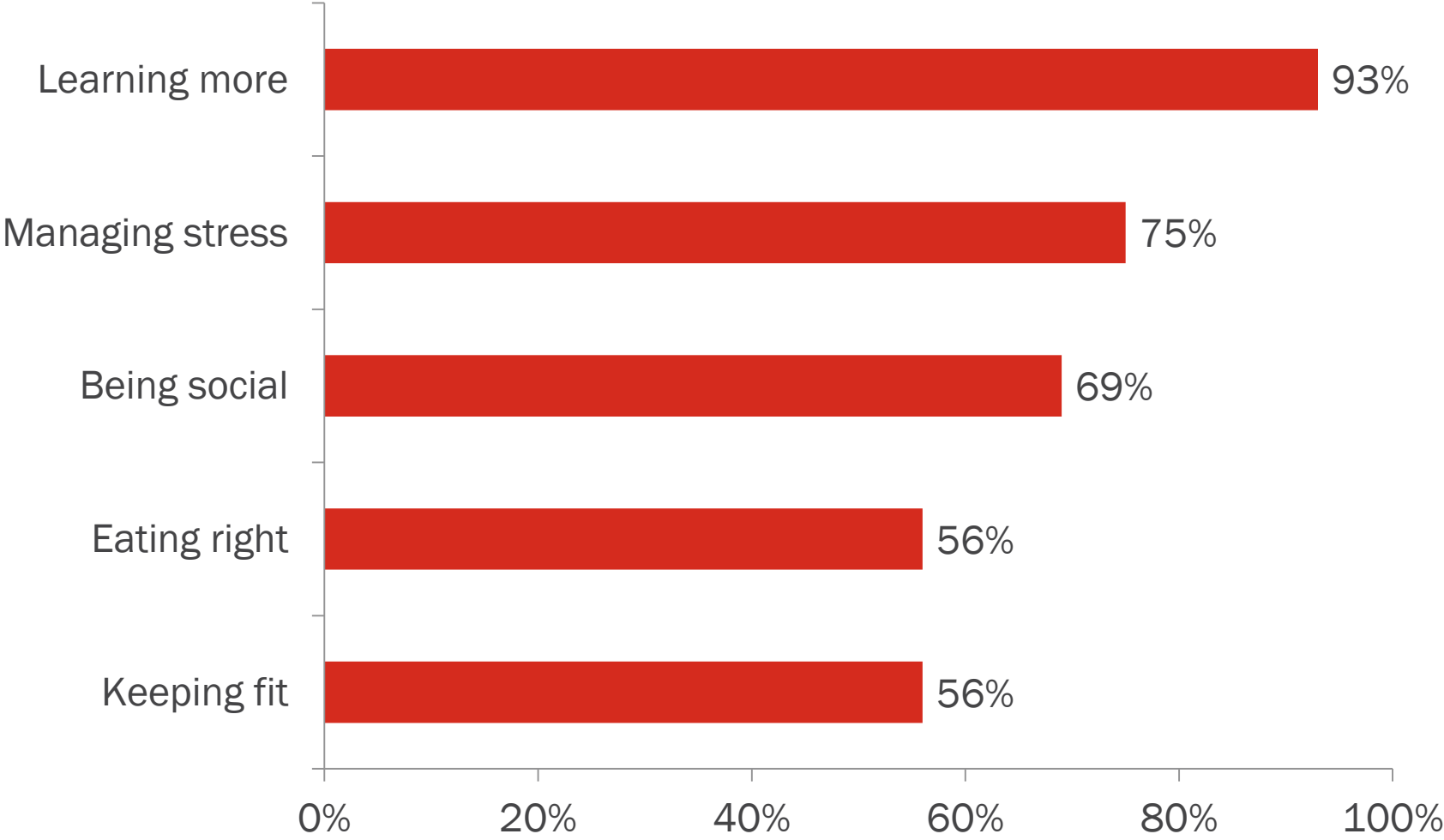
A large discrepancy exists between what adults think is important to maintaining or improving brain health and activities that they engage in regularly. The largest discrepancy is in effective stress management.



Q8: How important do you think each of the following are to maintaining or improving brain health?

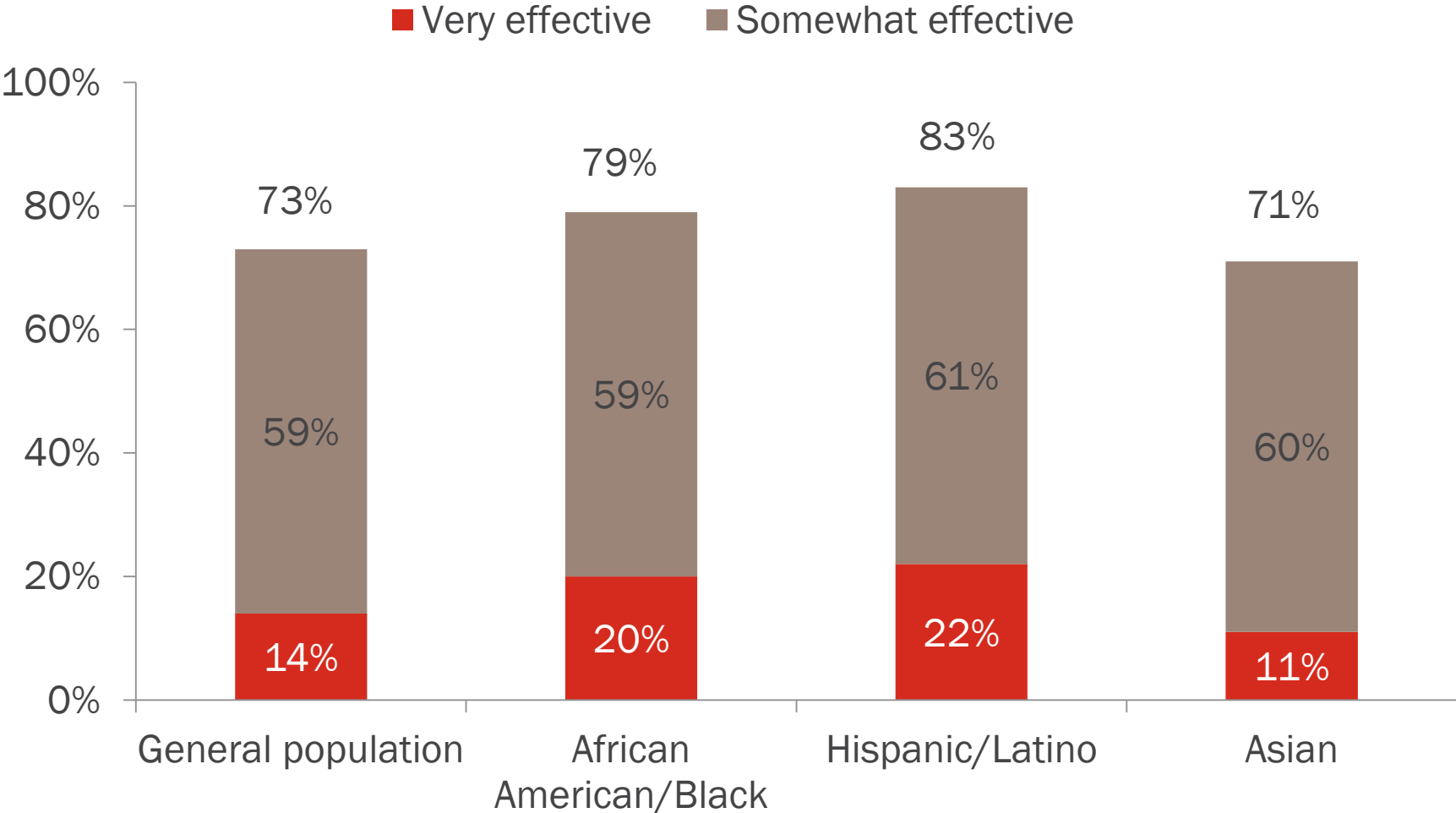
Q11: Which of the following activities do you regularly do?

# Nearly all adults engage in at least one activity under one of the five pillars of brain health.



*The 19 items in Q11 were collapsed into 5 categories to examine the five pillars of brain health that AARP and its partners have identified as priority areas. The item "take vitamins or supplements" was excluded from this analysis. This chart depicts the percent of respondents who engage in at least one activity under each category.*

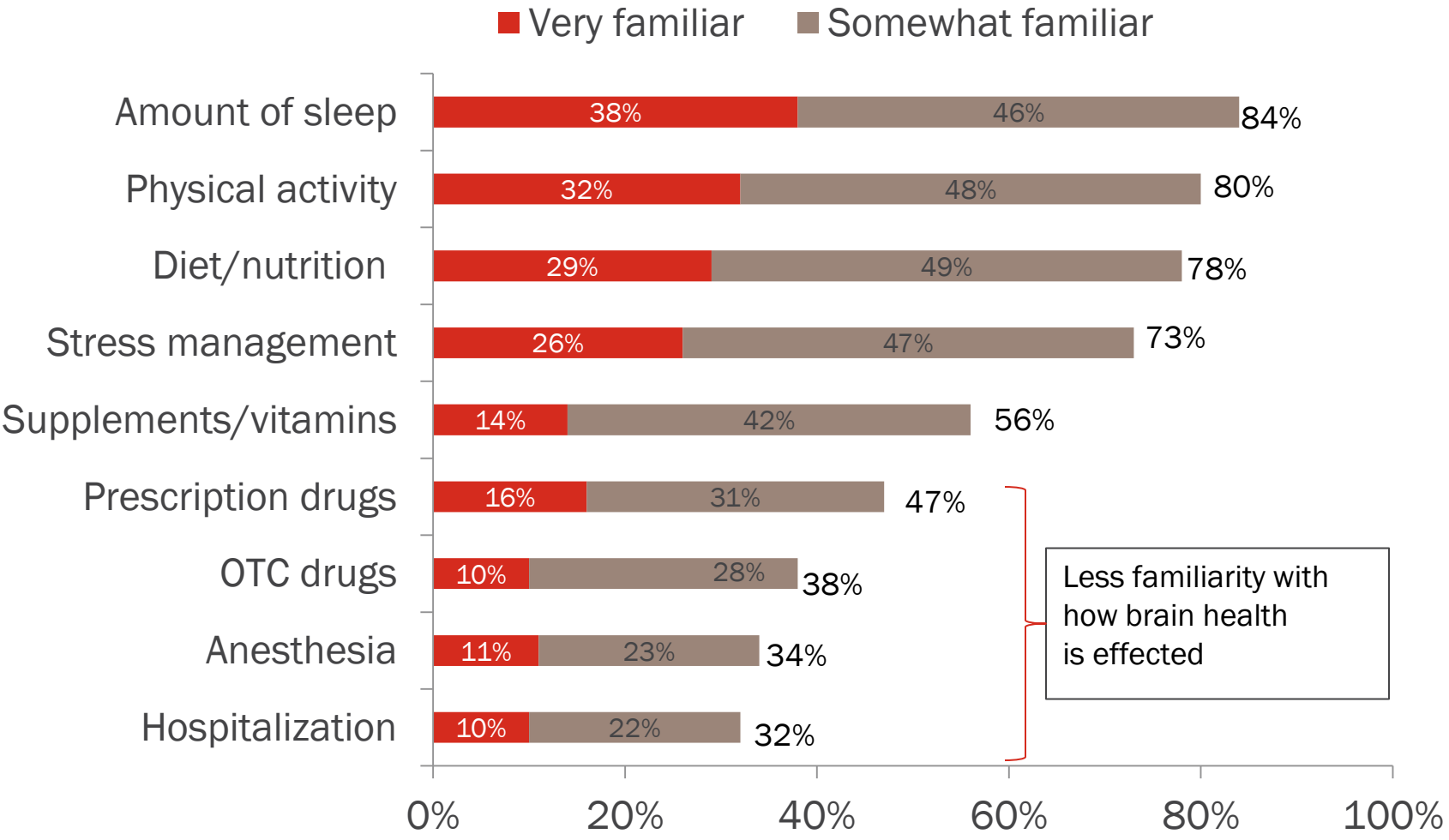
Three-quarters of adults believe that vitamins or supplements are at least somewhat effective in improving or maintaining brain health but intensity is not very strong.



Q12: How effective do you think taking vitamins or supplements is to improving or maintaining brain health?

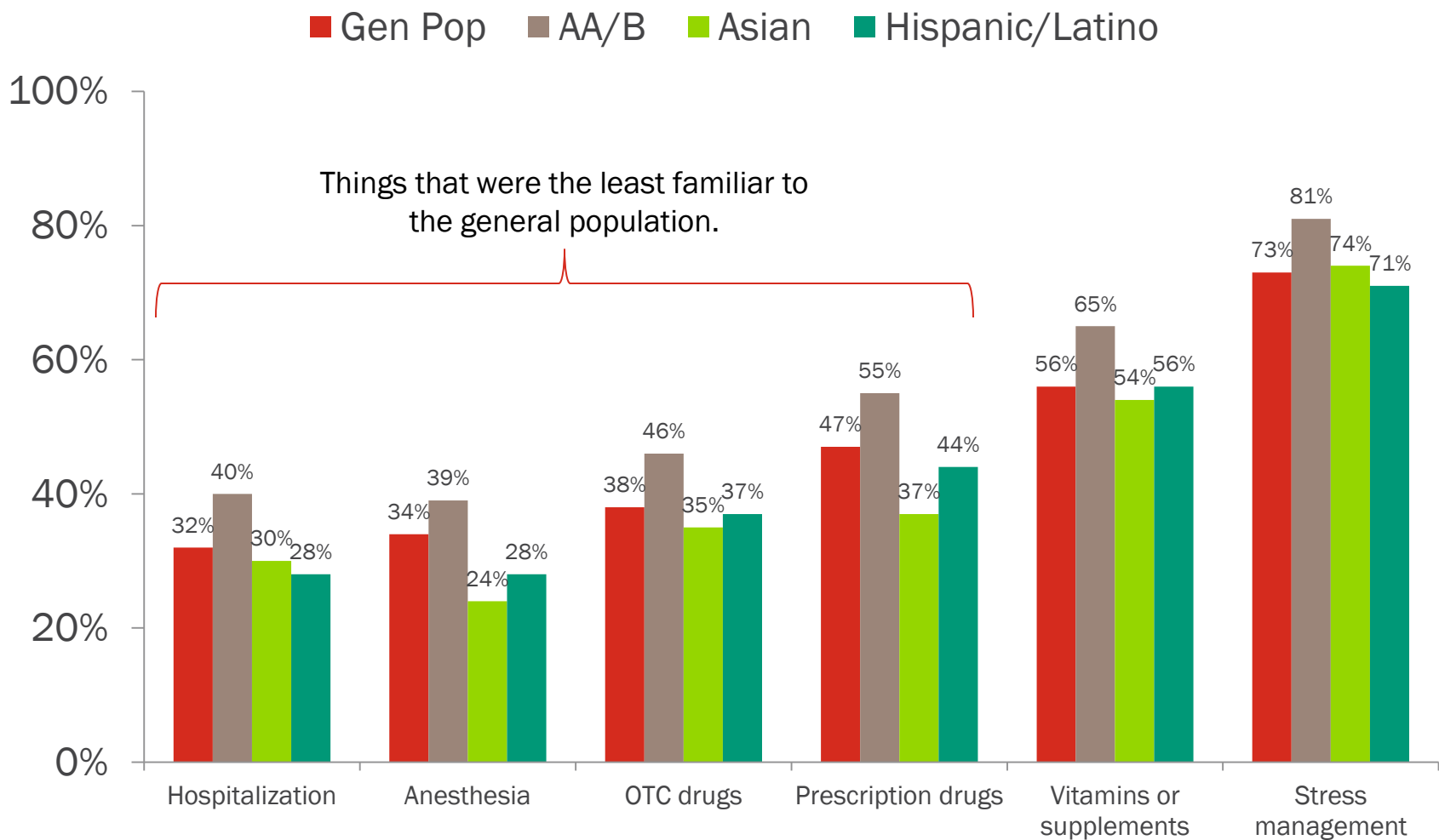
# Knowledge and Behavior Change

Most adults are at least somewhat familiar with how sleep, exercise, and diet effect brain health but only about one-third are very familiar.



Q17: How familiar are you, if at all, about the effect the following things may have on your brain health?

Overall, adults are the least familiar with how medications, anesthesia, and hospitalization effect brain health. African American/Black adults are the most familiar with how these things effect brain health.

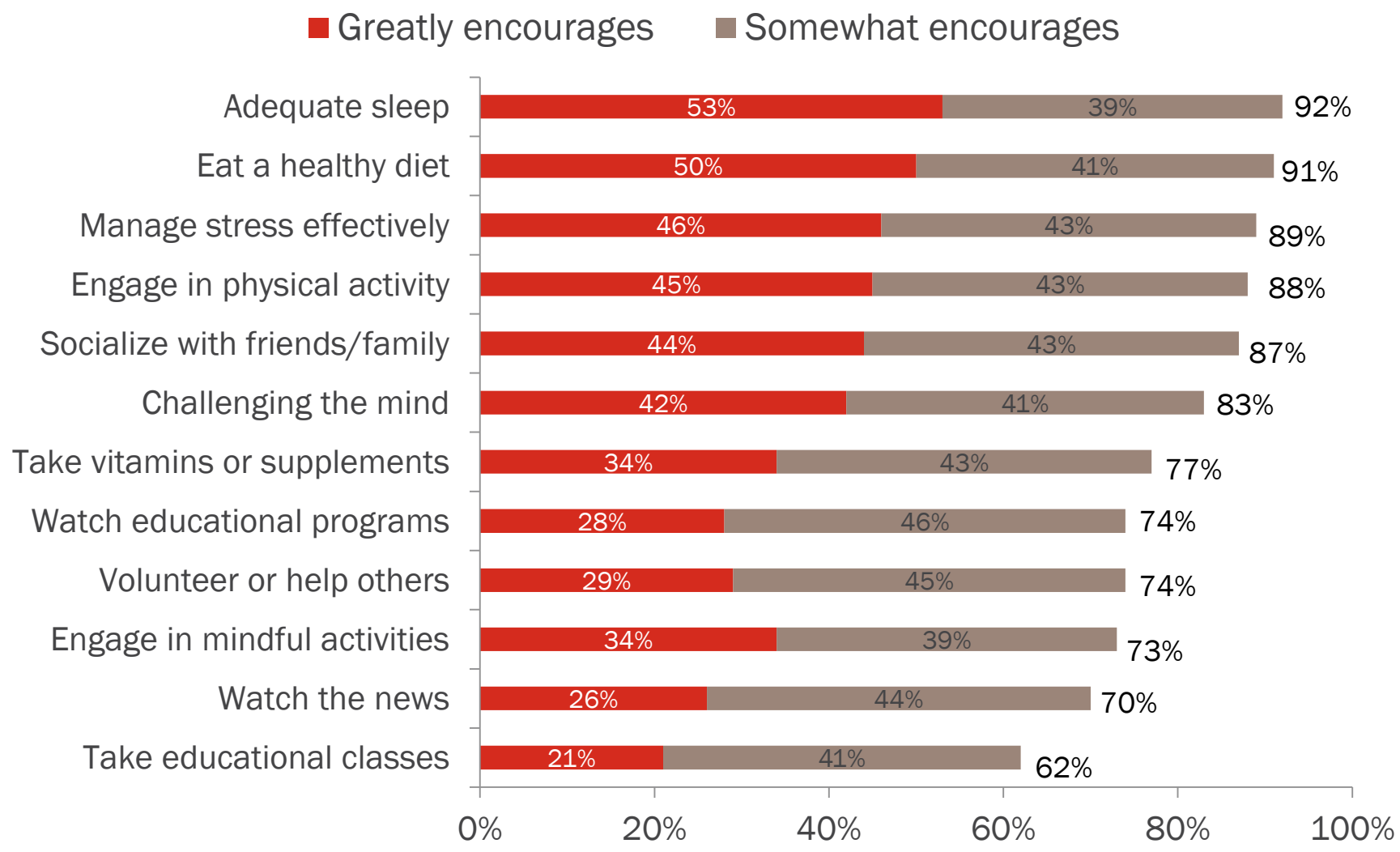


Q17: How familiar are you, if at all, about the effect the following things may have on your brain health?

# Interest in Brain Healthy Activities



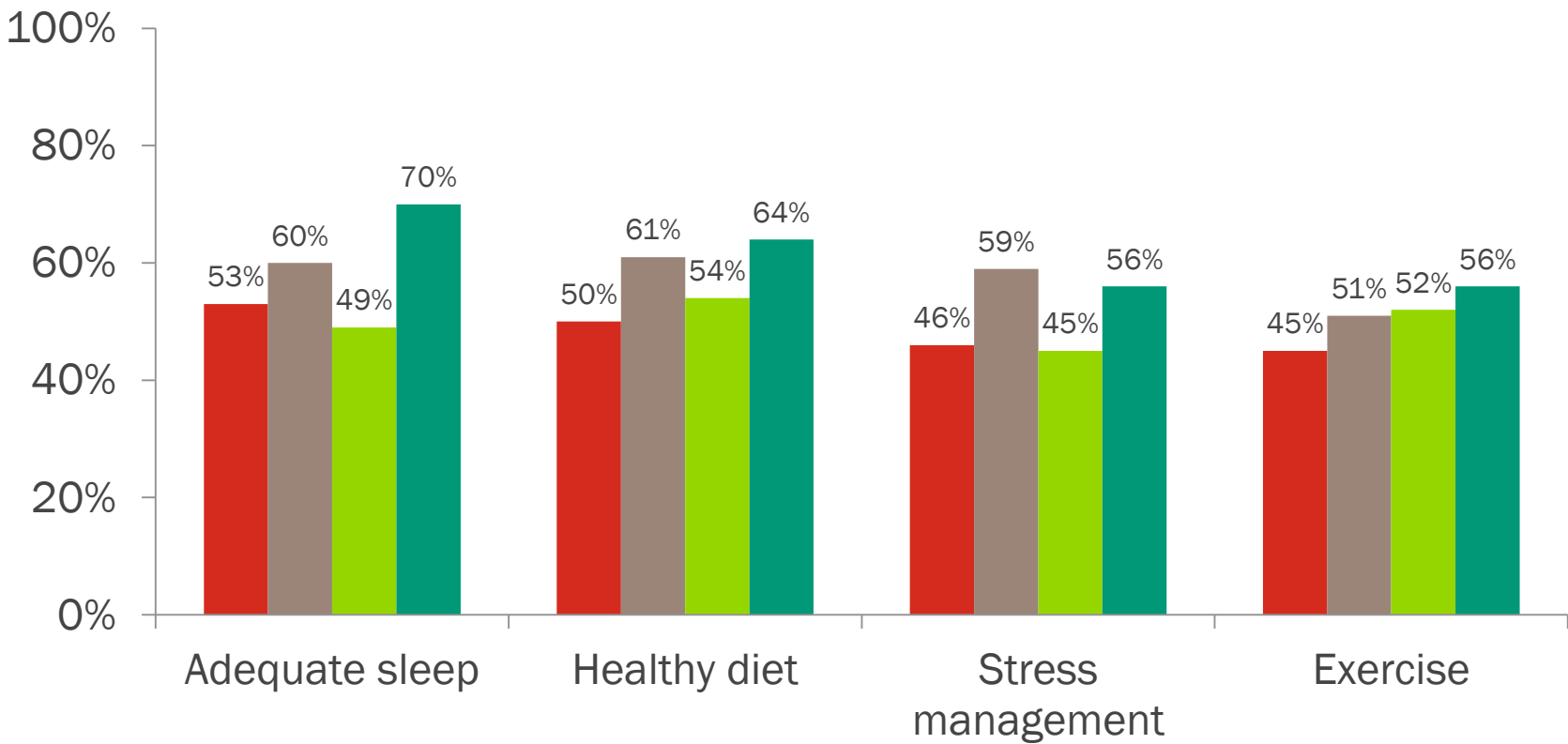
A majority of adults would be at least somewhat encouraged to engage in the following activities, once informed they may be good for brain health.



Q18: Suppose you were told that each of the following activities below was shown to improve brain health. How does knowing this encourage you to engage in, or engage in more, in the following activities?

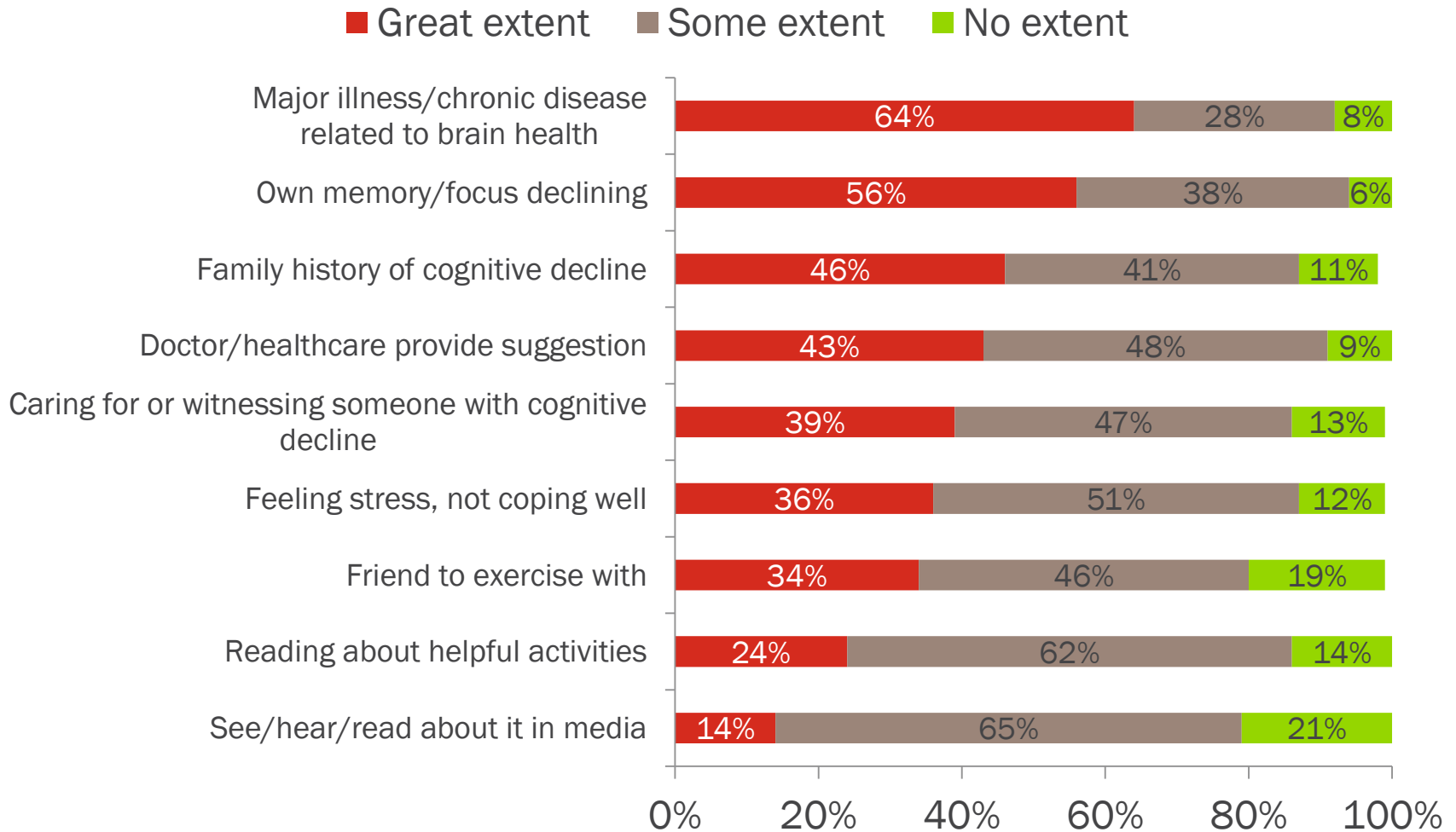
# African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino adults report a greater intent to engage in the following behaviors.

■ Gen Pop ■ AA/B ■ Asian ■ Hispanic/Latino



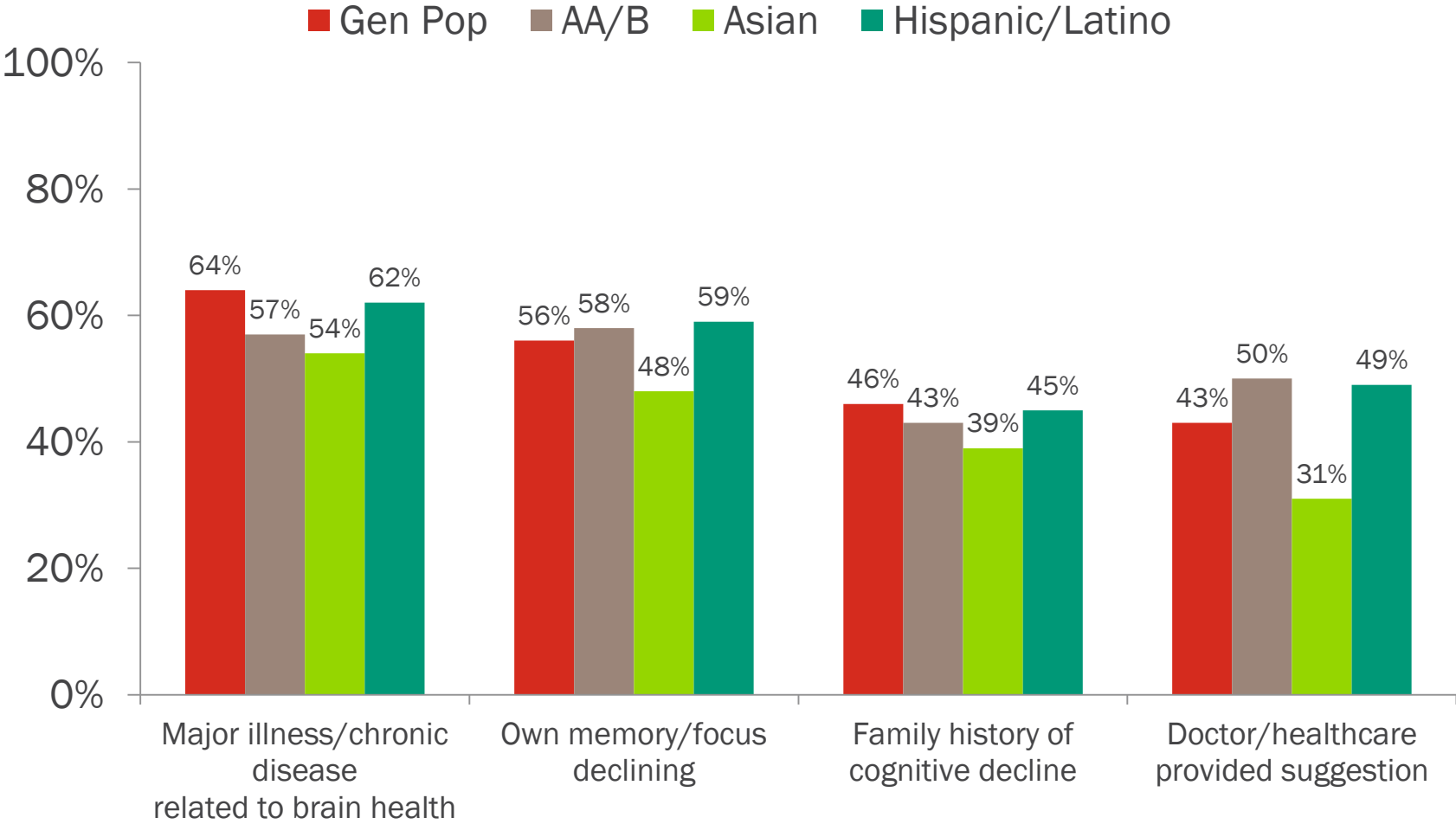
Q18: Suppose you were told that each of the following activities below was shown to improve brain health. How does knowing this encourage you to engage in, or engage in more, in the following activities?

The top situational motivators for behavior change appear to be situations that affect adults personally.



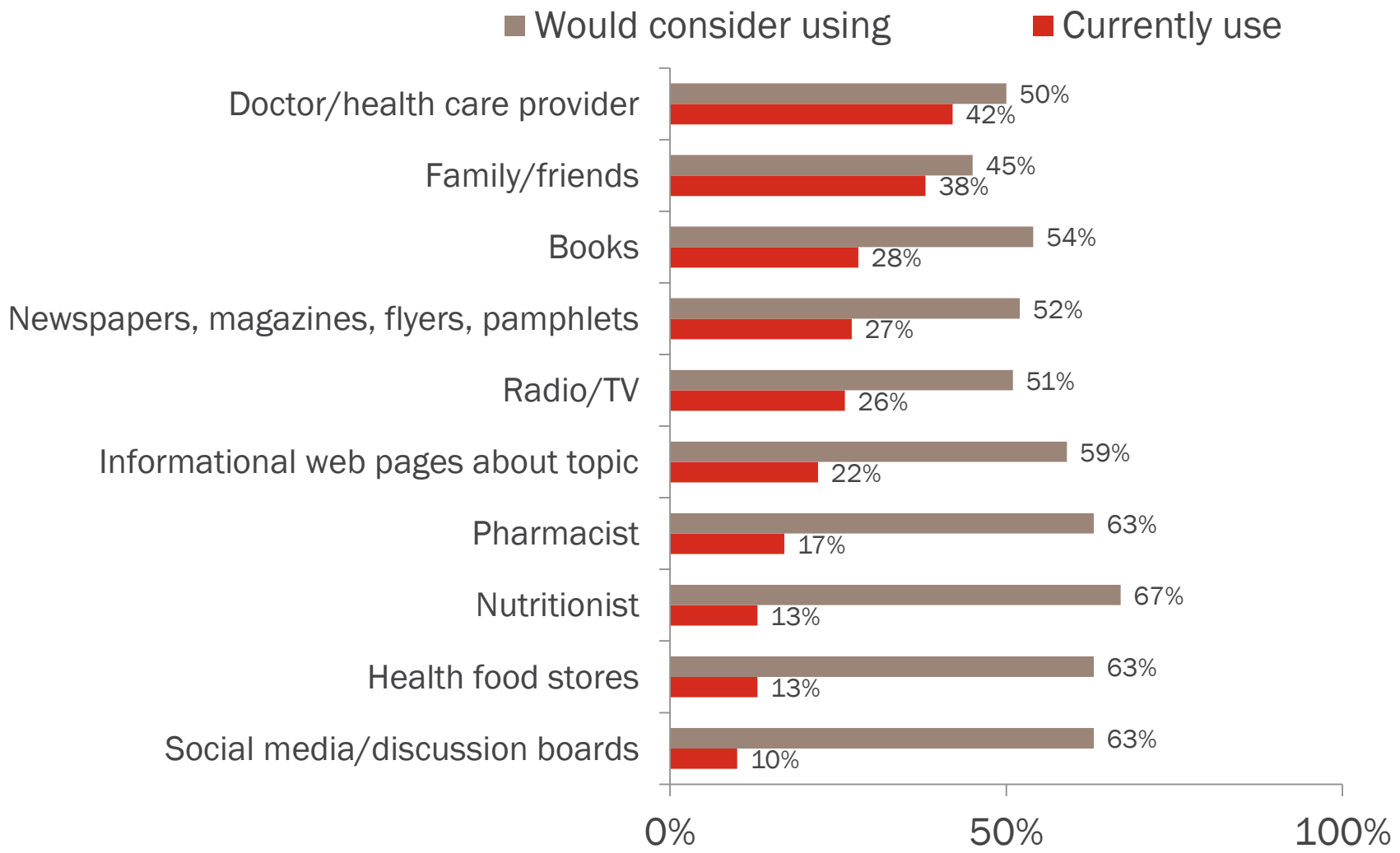
Q21: To what extent would each of the following situations encourage you to engage in activities to improve you brain health?

Asians would be encouraged by these situations to a lesser extent, especially when it comes to a doctor's suggestions.



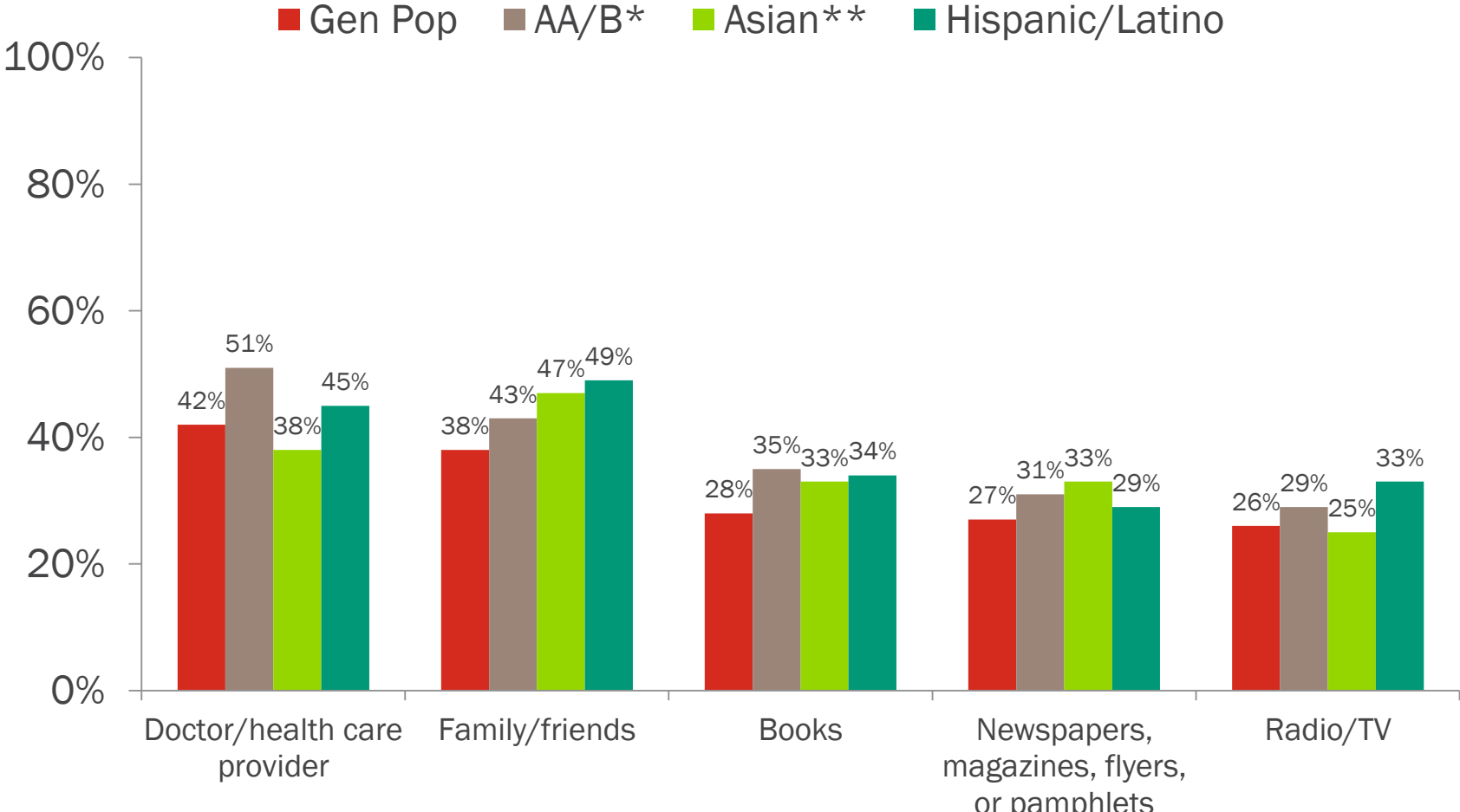
Q21: To what extent would each of the following situations encourage you to engage in activities to improve your brain health?

The most common source for advice on brain health are health care providers. Few currently turn to social media/discussion boards but many would consider it.



Q22: Which of the following sources do you currently use or would consider using to get advice about brain health?

More African American/Black adults currently turn to health care providers for advice on brain health while more Hispanic/Latino adults turn to family or friends.



Top five information sources determined by the general population.

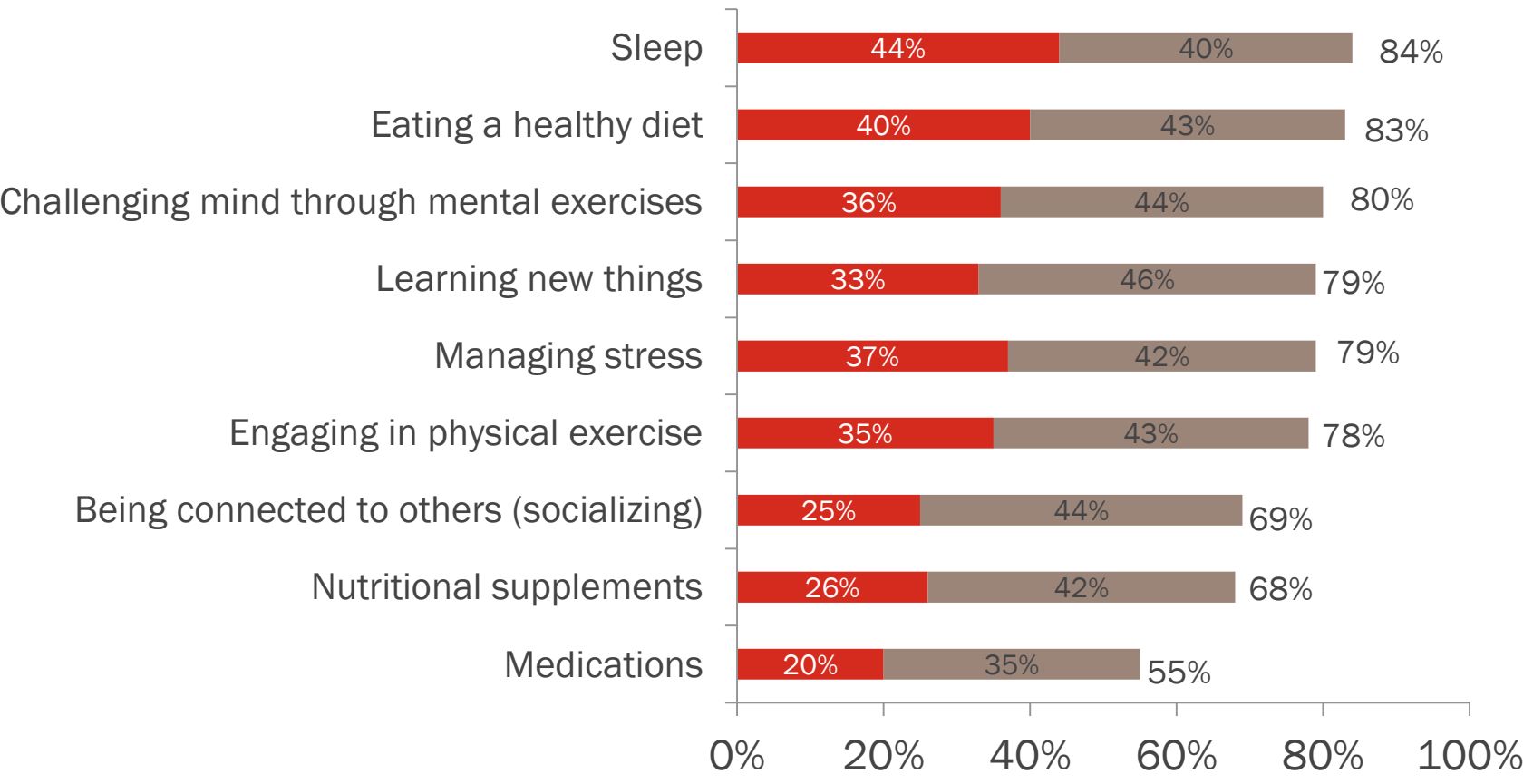
\*For African Americans/Blacks, “Pharmacist” was in the top five and “Radio/TV” was not.

\*\*For Asians, “Informational web pages about the topic” was in the top five and “Radio/TV” was not.

*Q22: Which of the following sources do you currently use or would consider using to get advice about brain health?*

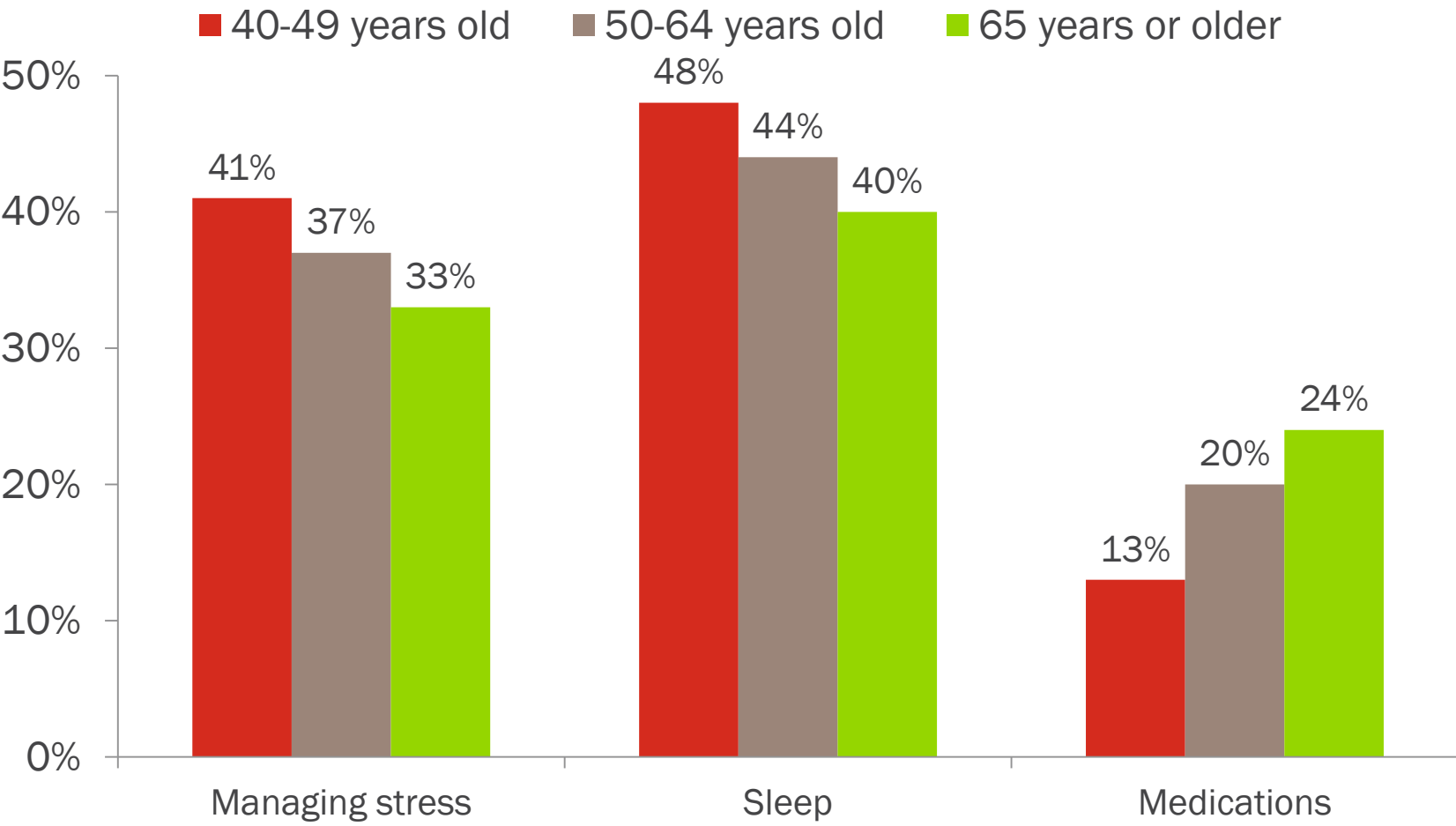
Most adults are interested in learning about how a variety of activities relate to brain health. Four in 10 or more are very interested in how sleep and a healthy diet are related to brain health. A lesser percentage is interested in medications and supplements.

■ Very interested    ■ Somewhat interested



Q23: Please tell us how interested you are in learning more about how the following activities are related to brain health.

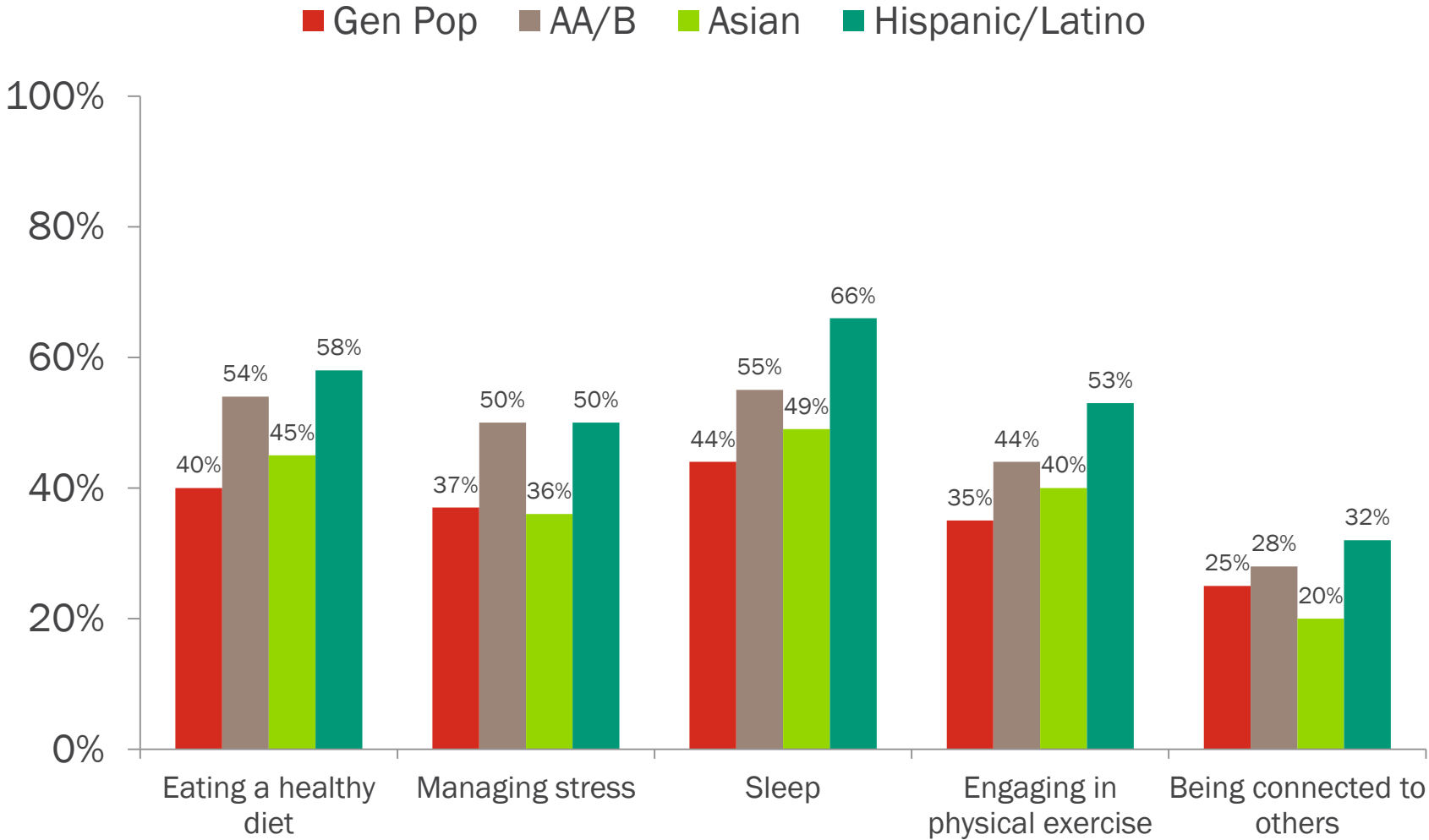
A higher percentage of younger adults are very interested in learning about how managing stress and sleep are related to brain health. For medications, however, nearly one-quarter of adults aged 65 or older are very interested in learning more compared to only about one in eight adults 40-49 years old.



Q23: Please tell us how interested you are in learning more about how the following activities are related to brain health.

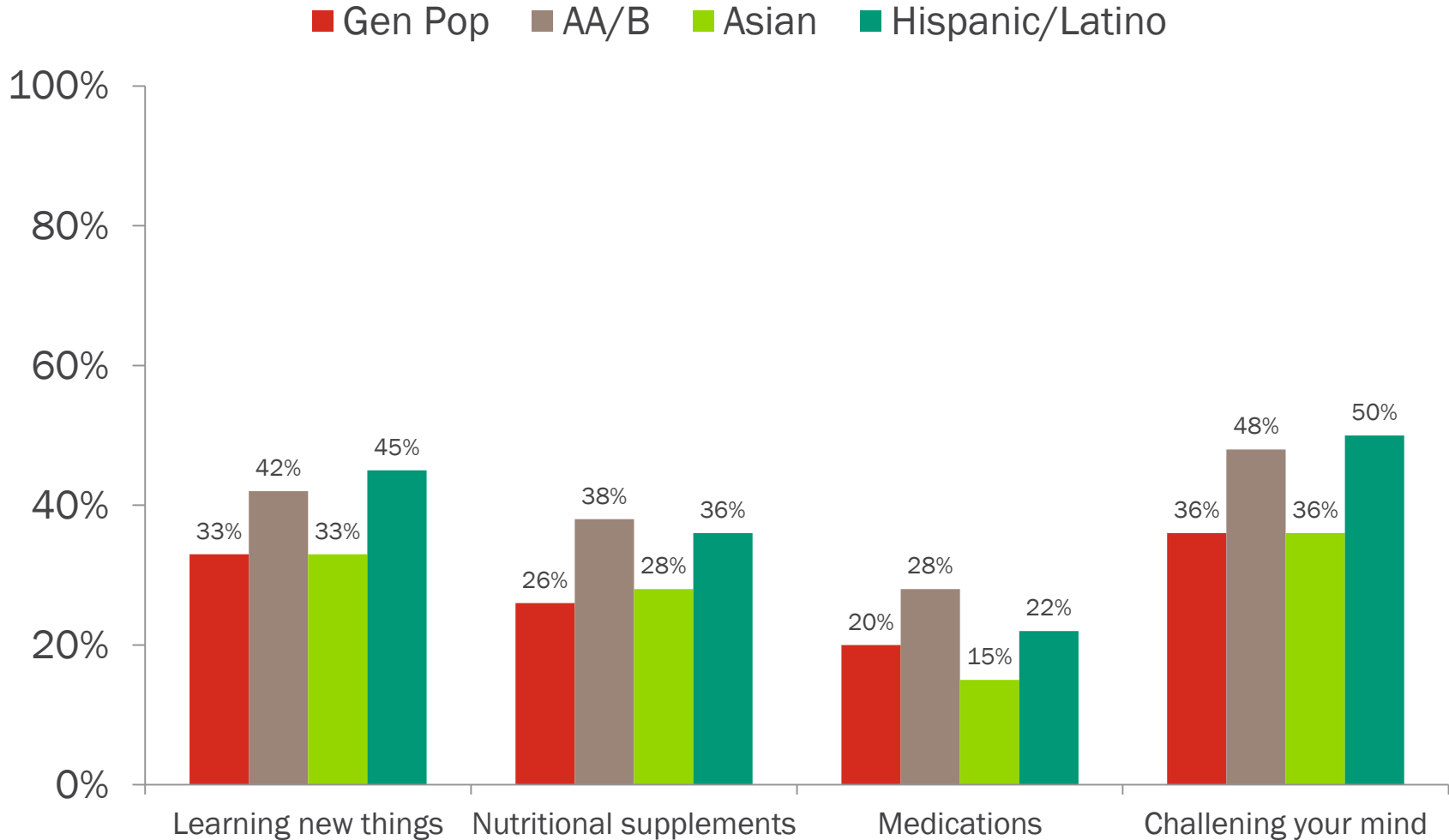


African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino adults are more likely be very interested in learning about how each activity is related to brain health.



Q23: Please tell us how interested you are in learning more about how the following activities are related to brain health.

Half of Hispanic/Latino and African American/Black adults are very interested in how challenging the mind is related to brain health compared to just over one-third of the general population and Asians.



Q23: Please tell us how interested you are in learning more about how the following activities are related to brain health.