

# Behind the spotless kitchen

IKEA Cooking & Eating Report 2026

cook & eat cook & eat cook & eat



eat cook & eat cook & eat cook & eat





# Executive summary

This report captures the habits, quirks and choices of how the world cooks and eats. We highlight four trends. Some are surprisingly wholesome rituals, others oddball realities behind closed doors.

## Comfortable chaos works

The way we eat thrives in creativity, mess and improvisation. Wing-it meals and lack of space haven't stopped us from enjoying food. We're still cooking five times per week on average. But we crave kitchens with more storage and surface space and better flow. We also think more about waste and our footprints than we did 10 years ago.

## Food (dis)comfort is strictly personal

Taste is on our terms. Pickiness isn't a flaw, and comfort depends on culture, habit and access. Hot and spicy can disrupt or soothe while takeout night can trigger cosiness or cause disruption. It all reminds us that taste is deeply personal and still evolving.

## Social pressure exists in the kitchen

Hosting, sharing kitchens and comparing skills can be stressful. But we're navigating it with flexibility, solo cooking and intention. Fear of judgment can make meals feel like a performance. Time and

affordability shape the quality and choice of what we eat. Yet we're making it work.

## Resetting the table on your own schedule

Mealtimes bend around life, sofas, screens and on-the-go bites. The traditional table has a changing role. Where and when we eat is defined by how we live, not what's expected.





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# Top 10 Cooking & Eating trends

## Sugar & spice

yum! yum!

**46%** of us love the sweets!

46% of us love the sweets, but for the Chinese, it's 64%. Norwegians are the biggest lovers of strong spicy flavours at 47%, Japan, the creators of wasabi, are the lowest at 13%!

## 4%

of us eat standing in the kitchen

- 44% eat at a kitchen table
- 4% eat standing in the kitchen
- 18% eat on the sofa
- 25% eat at a table in the living room
- 34% eat at a dining room table
- 4% eat in the bed  
Gen Z almost double as likely

## Skip the rules

Only **7%** of us use the kitchen table as a device-free zone.

40% of us watch TV while eating together with other people in the household. And 15% actually watch TV while eating with guests.

## 55%

associate cooking with something positive

Indian people are most likely to see cooking as a love language at 27% vs 15% global average. They also see it as a form of creative experimentation at 32% vs 24% global average.

## Less than 33%

of us are happy with our kitchens

Lack of storage (25%) and surface space (25%) are the biggest frustrations, and income makes very little difference.

The Dutch are the least concerned about their kitchens with 43% having no concerns.

## Past its prime

1 in 3 eat out-of-date food

Germans top the list with 55% eating expired food to avoid waste. Globally, the higher your income, the more likely you are to do the same. In fact, you're 6 percentage points more likely than people earning lower income.

## 29%

of us say we enjoy exploring different foods and cuisines

Globally, 29% are happy with the quality of food we eat, though the number drops by 6 percentage points for those with lower incomes.

Japan has the pickiest eaters at 21% vs 13% global average. China has the least picky at 7%. Speaking of picky eaters, only 9% of us globally say pickiness is a source of food waste.

## Too many cooks?

**40%** enjoy cooking alone

Only 28% of us living with a partner enjoy cooking with them. And 7% of people living with a partner say cooking together has led to an argument. Globally, only 25% who live with children say they enjoy cooking with them.

## Midnight munchies

**20%** of us indulge in late-night snacking

## 6:44 pm

The average dinner time is 6:44pm. On average, we eat dinner in 27 minutes. Low-income earners are twice as likely to eat dinner in less than 10 minutes compared to higher income households.



# Methodology

**31,339**  
People shared their cooking and eating habits.

**31**  
IKEA markets

The survey was conducted by the YouGov analysis institute. A total of 31,339 people aged 18+ were interviewed using CAWI methodology during the period of August-September 2025.

Respondents were in markets where IKEA stores are present. All markets have been weighted equally in the global figures. The samples were designed to be nationally representative as far as possible by gender, age and region using online panels.

**Nationally representative sample**  
Weighted by gender, age and geography

**Markets**  
Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, China, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK, USA





# 1. Comfortable chaos

Chaos, improvisation, and a lack of storage and surface space are making our kitchens less than perfect but comfortably real.







# The language of food

82%

of us enjoy cooking

Food has a way of expressing itself, much like people. It can show up on the plate as a reflection of creativity, a sense of accomplishment or simply a “whew, I got something on the table”. Overall, 82% of us enjoy cooking and 55% view it as something positive. Behind the high numbers and the fact that we cook five times per week on average, only a third of us actually feel confident in our cooking ability.

There are also those who don’t cook. When asked why, 24% say they don’t personally cook at home on weekdays due to lack of time. And for 11% of us, cooking simply holds no interest.

Food has a way of expressing itself, much like people

5x

amount we cook per week on average

The feelings around cooking are generally positive. But enthusiasm is mixed when time, interest and real life don’t keep up. Opting out or finding shortcuts is a kitchen reality whether we enjoy cooking or not.



# Eccentric eats

**1. UK**  
Brits are almost 3 times as likely not to have a dining table.

**2. Germany**  
Germans are more likely to eat out of date food to avoid waste (55%).

**3. Italy**  
Italians are unlikely to be bored with their food at 6% vs 11% global average.

**4. Serbia**  
Serbia is one of the countries most likely to associate cooking with creativity and experimentation at 32%.

**Tweaking the recipe**  
The countries most likely to associate cooking with creativity and experimentation

- 1. India, Serbia, Slovenia – 32%
- 2. Austria – 31%
- 3. Finland – 30%
- 4. Slovakia, Hungary, Germany, US – 29%
- 5. Italy, Croatia – 28%

**5. Finland**  
Finns are the most confident cooks at 50%.

**6. Sweden**  
Swedes love meatballs, jam, gravy and potatoes almost 3 times as much as the global average.

**7. Hungary**  
Hungarians are 2 times as likely to eat in bed.

**India** is most likely to see cooking as a love language at 27%. That's three times as likely than France at 9%. And those of us happy in our romantic relationships are 22 percentage points more likely than the average to see cooking as an act of love.

**8. Japan**  
Japanese are the least confident cooks at 8%.

**9. India**  
Indians are 11 percentage points more likely to feel lonely after dinner guests leave.

**10 South Korea**  
South Koreans say cooking more than they eat is the biggest cause of food waste.

**11. China**  
China has the biggest sweet tooth with 64% enjoying sweet flavours.

**12. New Zealand**  
New Zealanders enjoy fast food more than most (46%)



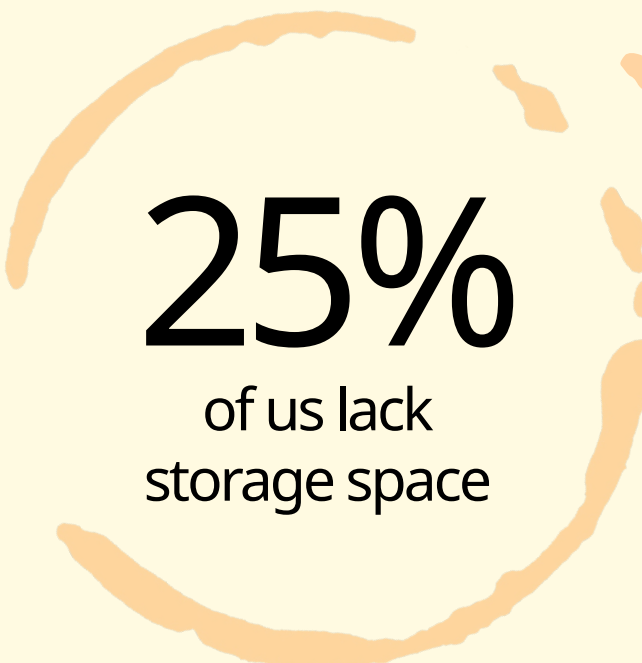
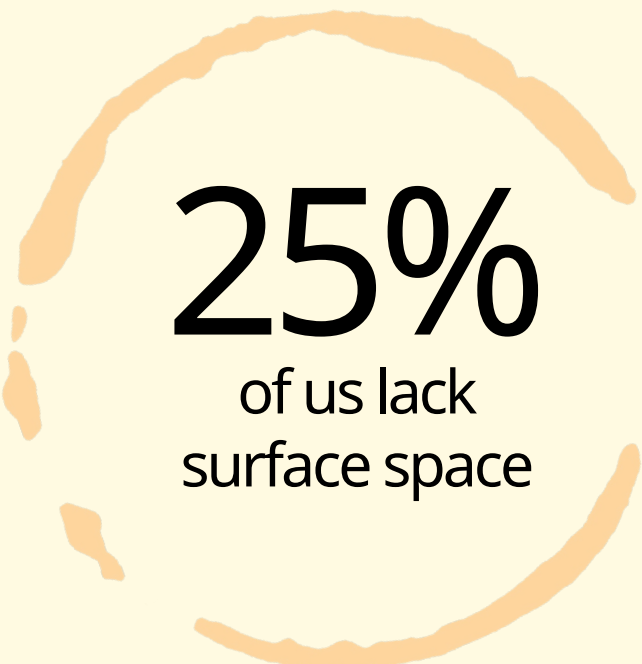
# It's not about the money

Less than one in three of us are happy with our kitchens. The biggest gripe? Space. And income barely matters. The struggle to navigate around the kitchen with enough room to make food and keep things organised is a headache for some of us. Lack of storage (25%) and lack of surface space (25%) are the biggest frustrations.

Turns out that there's not a huge difference in kitchen frustration based on what we earn. The share of us who report no

frustration with our kitchen is similar regardless of income level: higher (34%), middle (31%), lower (30%). And the Dutch have the least concern at 43%.

Not having enough room for prep, to store appliances, dishes or pots and pans puts kitchen satisfaction under a bit of pressure. If the kitchen doesn't flow, cooking feels harder than it should. Space isn't luxury. It's the difference between loving to cook and just making it work.







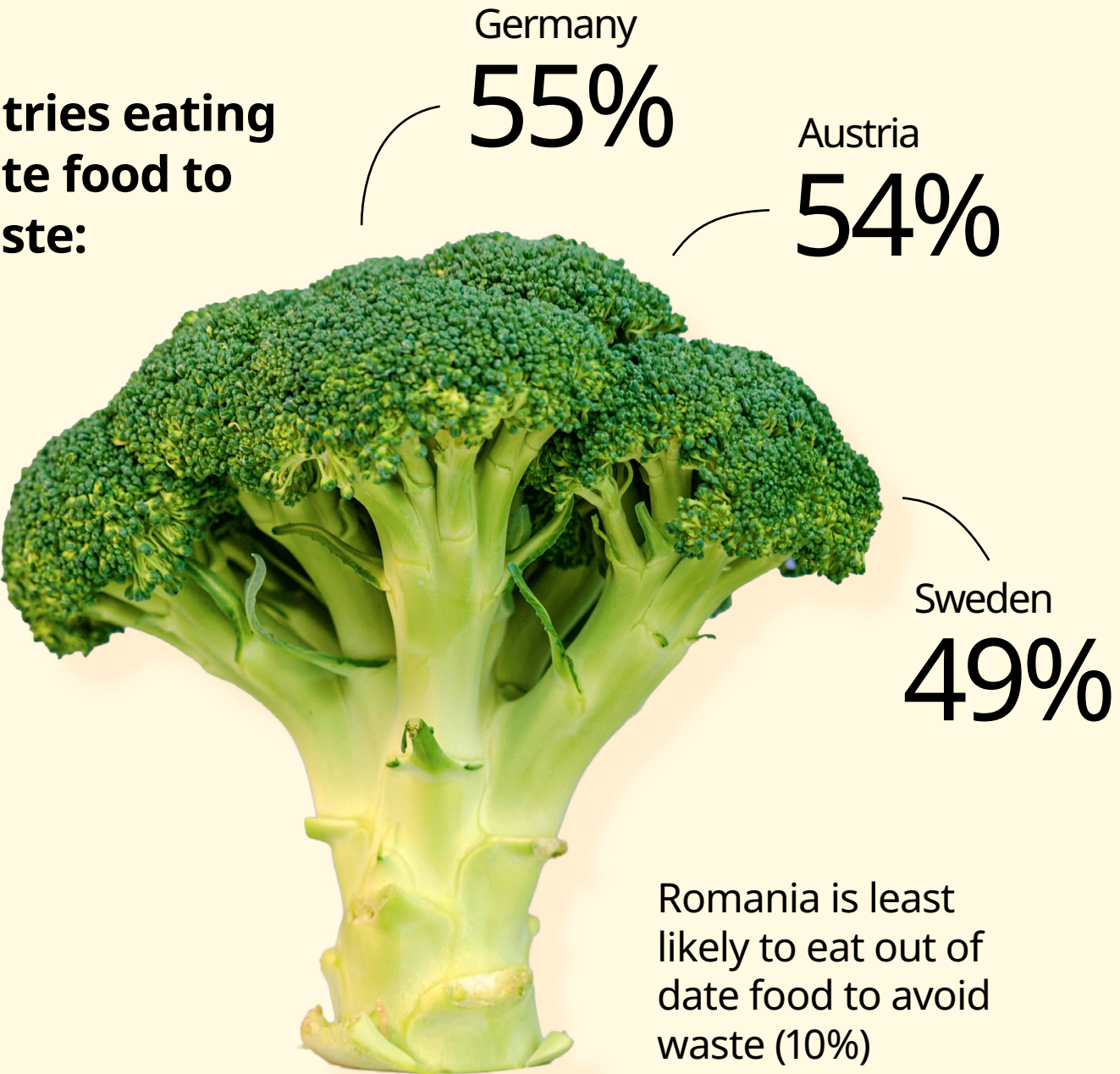
# Waste not, want not

We’re rethinking what lands on our plates and what ends up in the bin. It’s not just about flavours, but also about footprint. The good news? The days of double buying are fading. Just one in 10 of us say that we purchase food we already have at home.

Wanting to do good but debating when to throw food out versus eat it adds to hidden chaos. One in three of us actually eat out of date food to avoid waste. Europeans lead this trend, with Germany at 55%, Austria 54% and Sweden 49%. Romania plays it a little safer with a cautious 10%.

Overcooking is another factor in waste. Globally, 20% of us say cooking more than we can eat contributes to food waste.

Top countries eating out of date food to avoid waste:



South Koreans do it the most with 43% overcooking compared to only one in 10 Swedes.

Sustainability is more the norm and less of a chore than 10 years ago. We’re learning to shop smarter, too, doing less double buying. Making the choice to eat food that’s out of date is often a conscious decision about doing right by the planet. And sustainability isn’t a guilt trip. It’s just part of how we operate in our kitchens.





# A takeaway

Perfect plates are the goal for very few. It's the mix of comfort, chaos and creativity that matters. Even in imperfect kitchens, we keep cooking. Our kitchens are more than counters and cabinets; they determine how we cook and eat. Meals where we improvise, kitchens that aren't flawless and decisions about food add up to the real every day when eating at home.



# 2. Discomfort foods

What feels like soul food to some might be repulsive to others, depending on culture and quirks.







# Picky eaters

Some of us are a little picky. But pickiness deserves a better reputation. It's not a flaw, but a feature. What we will (or won't) eat tells a story about our culture as much as it does about taste.

Sometimes it's sticking to a familiar meal rotation. Same breakfast, lunch or dinner week after week. Other times, it's as simple as disliking a certain texture or flavour. Are we talking to you, coriander? So, which countries are the least and most picky?

Japan has the pickiest eaters at 21% vs 13% global average. China is the least picky at 7%.

Only 9% of us globally say pickiness is a source of food waste.



The **most** picky  
**Japan**

21% (vs 13% global average)

The **least** picky  
**China**

7% (vs 13% global average)



# Outside the comfort zone

Most of us hover in a familiar comfort zone. Only 25% of us want to try new foods more often, and less than a third of us are satisfied with the quality of food we eat. Our relationship to food is not always a personal, conscious choice. Sometimes, it's a matter of what we've grown up eating or where we come from. A full 40% of us enjoy eating foods that are nostalgic or tied to our childhoods.

40% of us enjoy eating foods that are nostalgic or tied to our childhoods



**CINNAMON BUN**  
#9E6F5C



Globally, our food curiosity varies. Around the world, we differ in how curious we are about food. While 29% of us enjoy exploring different foods and cuisines, people from China enjoy it the most (42%). Japan (20%) and South Korea (15%) seem to enjoy it the least.

That being said, our preferences can change over time: 18% of us say we were picky as kids, but only 13% say we're picky now.



# We like what we like. Until we don't.

## Fresh is a flex

Cooking has become less about effort and more about intention.

- 46% of us cook from scratch
- 59% of us cook with fresh ingredients
- The higher our life satisfaction, the more hands-on cooking from scratch we're more likely to do (6 percentage points more likely)
- Feeling good about food quality also makes us more likely to cook from scratch (14 percentage points more likely)

Women are ahead of the curve on plant-based eating, enjoying it at 1.5 times the rate of men (15% vs 10%).

## Routines over variety

Despite access to more global cuisines, most of us are creatures of habit.

One in five of us cycle through the same 10 or fewer dinner meals. And 40% of us say we eat the same or similar breakfast every day.

# 20%

of us eat the same 10 or fewer dinner meals

# 59%

of us cook with fresh ingredients

creatures of habit creatures of habit



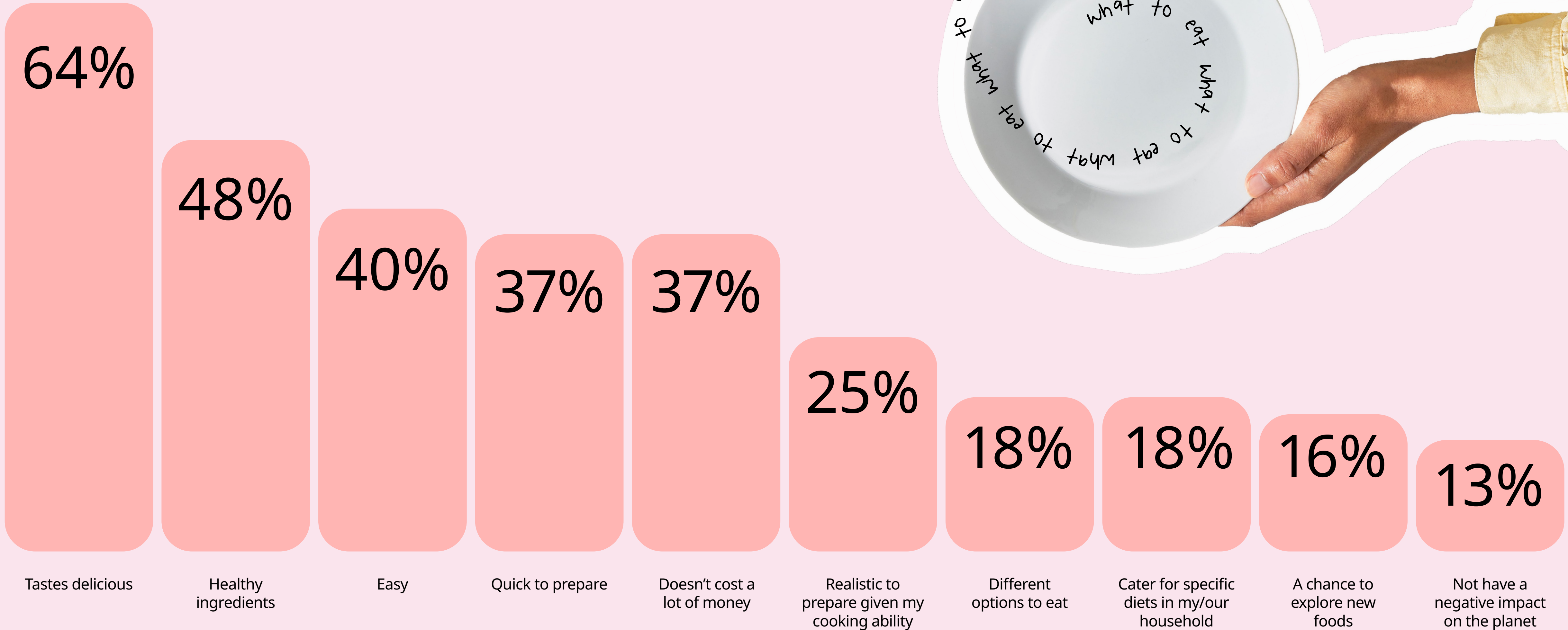
## oddball

I sometimes claim to dislike foods even if I haven't tried them (11%)



# Dinner decisions

Key influences driving dinner choice  
when eating out or at home





# Are you sweet

- 1 The sweet tooth reigns for almost one in two of us (46%).
- 2 Women are 8 percentage points more likely to have a sweet tooth than men.
- 3 China has the biggest sweet tooth (64%)



oddball

Danes are the biggest liquorice lovers (41% vs 15% global average)



# or spicy?

- 1 27% say yes to spice and strong flavours! But which part of the world really turns up the heat?

Top 3 spice-enjoying countries:

1. Norway (47%)
2. Sweden (45%)
3. Finland (39%)

- 2 Men are 6 percentage points more likely to enjoy spice than women.

- 3 "Turn down the heat!" The inventors of wasabi enjoy spice the least—Japanese at 12%



# Takeout culture

47% of us prefer a home-cooked meal. As we age, this number increases. Gen Z (33%) is less likely than Millennials (38%) and older generations (55%) to prefer home-cooked meals.

Slovenians and Spaniards (57%) are the most likely to prefer home cooking to takeaway.

Europeans order takeout the least (0.7 times per week) vs Asians (1.8 times per week).

If frustrated with something in our kitchens, we order restaurant takeaway 62% more often than if we are not.

**47%**  
of us prefer a  
home-cooked  
meal

yes please  
yes please  
yes please  
yes please  
yes please





# A takeaway

Across cultures, we mostly stick to what we love. Pickiness is sometimes a choice born from abundance, quality or habit. Ingredients that are fresh, local and in season set the bar high, making novelty less appealing.

Curiosity and comfort are nice, but what we eat ultimately reflects heritage, routines and access. Comfort food can also be as simple as whatever arrives fastest to the couch. Sweet, spicy or adventurous, discomfort foods are only uncomfortable to some. Taste is personal, exactly as it should be.



# 3. The social pressure cooker

The pressure of other people and prices are turning meals into opportunities to impress, as well as auditions for approval.





# Cooking with others

Food is social. But that can mean pressure on the person making or sharing it. While eating together is sometimes a necessity and sometimes a choice, cooking can be tricky. Turns out, a lot of us think there are too many cooks in the kitchen.

Among those of us who live with our partner, less than one in three of us enjoy cooking with them. And 7% say cooking together has led to an argument. In India, this number more than doubles (17%). Eating alone more often is what 8% of us would like to do. And 5% of us would like to eat less often with people in our households.



Less than  
**1 in 3**  
of us living with  
our partner enjoy  
cooking with  
them

While we love our children, only one in four of us enjoy cooking with them!



**Oddball**  
8% of us would like to  
eat alone more often



8%

Fortunately, the importance of meal sharing is still a thing. Heading to a friend's place for dinner happens almost once a week (global average of 0.8 times). For a lucky few, dinner at a friend's is actually a dinner date. Gen Z are proving romance isn't dead. They're most likely to cook for a date.



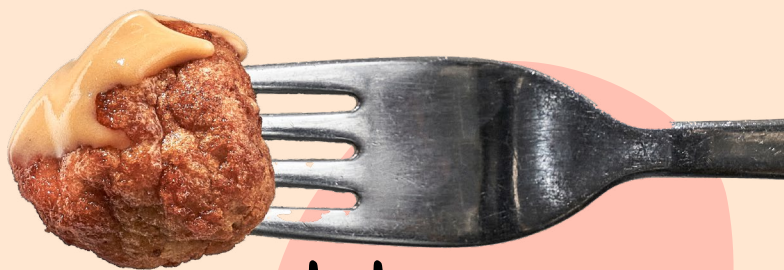


# Eating with others

Associations to having guests for meals



open the door for connections



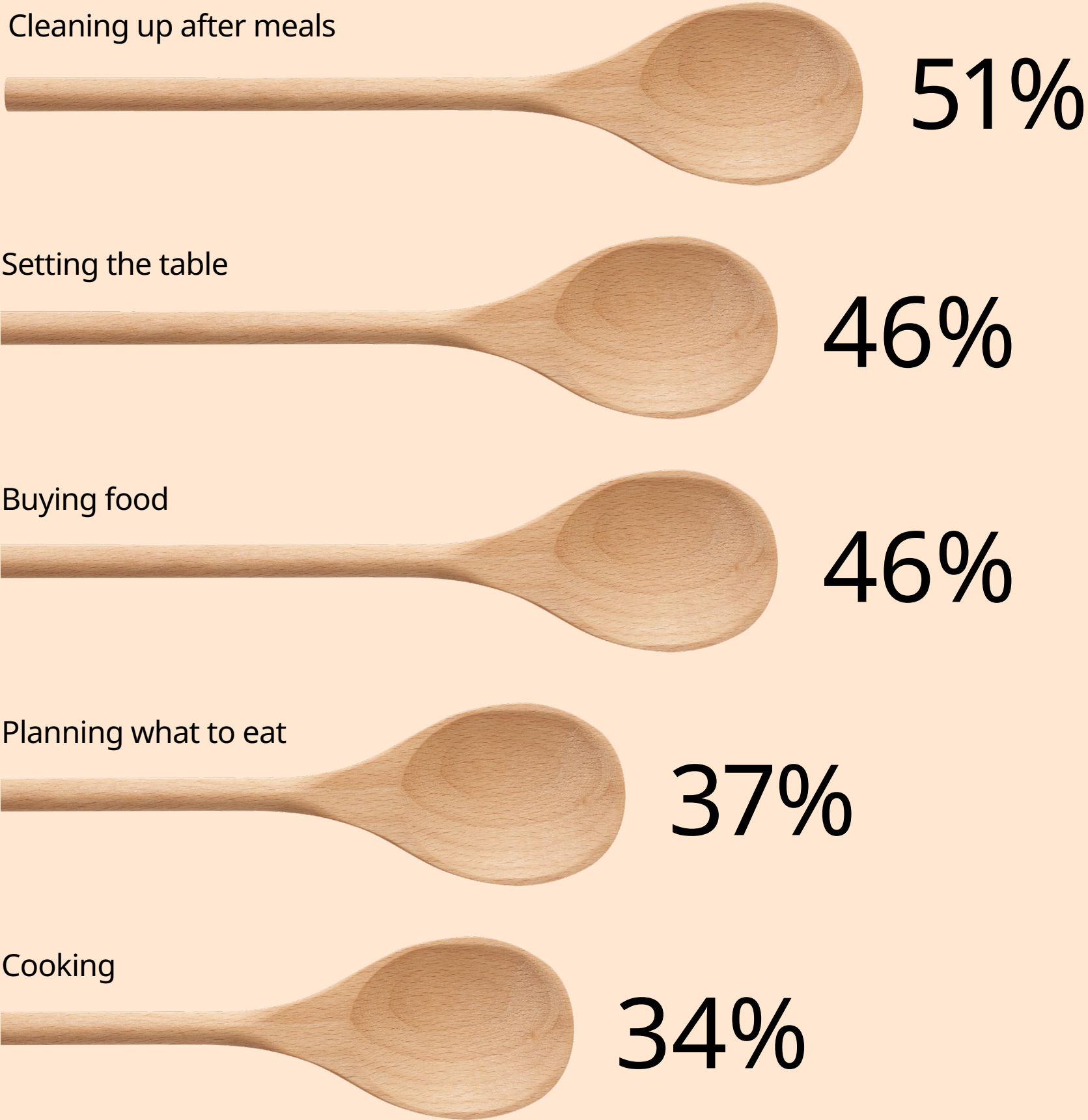
oddball

People in the US are less likely to have an open-door policy at mealtime



# Inequal measure

Equally shared tasks between partners living together



Good news! While only 1 in 3 partners living together share the cooking, half share clean-up

Of people living with a partner, Finland (44%) and New Zealand (42%) have the most cooking equality. Denmark and Germany are tops at sharing clean-up duties after a meal (62%)

**Same society, different rules**  
We still have a way to go on outdated gender roles. Women are consistently more likely than men to do meal planning, shopping and cleaning. For women working full-time, the second shift isn't over. Women working full-time (59%) are more likely to take on the cooking role compared to men (34%). Men are twice as likely as women to say they don't cook due to their lack of skill (16% vs 8%).







# The pressure on the purse strings

Money matters. Only one in four of us are satisfied with our financial situation, and it has a clear impact on what and how we eat. Just 29% of us say we're happy with our food quality. This number rises to 42% in the UK and 41% in Finland. And least happy are Japan and Slovakia at 18% and China at 8%.



## oddball

Those of us who earn the most are most likely to eat out-of-date food to avoid waste (36% vs 32% global average)

1 in 4

of us are satisfied with their financial situation



Low-income families are 13 percentage points less likely than high-income households to be satisfied with the quality of their food.



High-income households are 10 percentage points more likely to cook with fresh ingredients than low-income households (64% vs 54%).



Only 6% of us don't look at prices when grocery shopping.







# A takeaway

The pressure we put on ourselves around meals is mostly internal. Hosting friends, comparing ourselves and dodging judgment are all on the menu. Yet we're still cooking together, sometimes for others, but often just for family. And there's still room for improvement when it comes to the inequality of chores. Sadly, affordability influences not just taste, but also choice.



# 4. Resetting the table

The dining table has almost become a metaphor for eating anywhere. Sitting down to have a meal and talk over the day is a different reality than it once was.





# It's ~~5:00~~ 6:44pm somewhere

The average dinner time around the world is 6:44pm, and we eat in 27 minutes. There are even 5% of us who eat it in 10 minutes or less. Those with a lower income are more likely to eat in under 10 minutes than those with higher incomes.

Not everyone's in a hurry, though. There are 2% of us who say we eat for 1-1.5 hours on a typical weeknight. And while just before 7pm is the global average, not everyone eats so early. People in Spain are the latest diners. They typically have their weekday dinner at 8:54pm. Finns are the earliest at 5:17pm.

But how late is too late? One in ten of us eat after 9pm.



  
**oddball**  
14% of us like to eat food straight from the packet

**10 min**  
Those of us with a lower income are more likely to eat in under 10 minutes

We eat dinner in  
27 minutes on  
average



# Have a seat, or not?

The table is playing a different role. Many of us view it as a stylish piece of furniture rather than an everyday place for eating. There are also 10% of us who use the dining table to make important life decisions. Time (or lack of it) influences when, where or whether we eat together. But Slovenians, Chinese and Italian love sitting down at the table for everyday meals.

## Dinner seems to happen everywhere

**4%**  
of us eat in bed

**10%**  
use the dining table to make important life decisions

**4%**  
of us eat standing in the kitchen

**3x**  
Brits are nearly 3 times as likely not to have a dining table than the global average

**18%**  
of us eat on the sofa

Gen Z are almost twice as likely (7%) to eat in bed as other generations



**oddball**  
While many of us eat all over the house, 1% of us claim not to know where we typically eat





# Do I have to turn it off?

40%

of us watch TV while eating with the people we live with

If you can survive a meal without a device, congrats. You're a rare breed. Only 7% of us live in households with device-free policies at the dining table. But our obsession with TV is not just when eating alone. As many as 40% of us watch TV while eating with the people we live with. And 15% of us watch TV while eating with guests!







# A takeaway

Meals haven't disappeared, but tradition has. Dinner now bends around our lives, not the other way around. It lands on sofas, in front of screens and in on-the-go moments. And the table still matters, just not in the same way.



# Outlook

Eating is personal and flexible. The future of food will follow freshness and the way we live more than it will follow innovation.



... DOESN'T  
NEAT, BUT THAT'S  
AHEAD, PEOPLE DON'T NECESSA  
THEY WANT SPACES THAT FLEX  
MIDWEEK DINNER, THE MIDNIGHT SNACK, THE  
OVER EACH OTHER -WEEKEND BRUNCH. AS LIVING ROOMS BE  
AND KITCHENS BECOME SOCIAL HUBS (OR QUIET SOLO SANCTUARIES),  
NEED TO WORK HARDER, BEND FURTHER, AND SUPPORT ALL THE  
EAT TODAY. COOKING AND EATING AT HOME ARE FULL OF DELIGHT  
DUCTIONS. WE LOVE THE CREATIVITY OF COOKING BUT DON'T ALWAYS FE  
IDENT DOING IT. WE TREASURE EATING TOGETHER, YET OFTEN END UP  
SCATTERED AROUND THE SOFA. WE IMAGINE FUTURISTIC KITCHENS, WHILE SECRE  
HOPE TECHNOLOGY DOESN'T TAKE OVER TOO MUCH. REAL LIFE AROUND FOOD IS  
RARELY NEAT, BUT THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT MAKES IT MEANINGFUL. LOOKING  
AHEAD, PEOPLE DON'T NECESSARILY WANT MORE GADGETS OR BIGGER KITCHENS.



# Looking ahead

Looking 10 years ahead, will cooking be back to basics or full-on tech? A decade from now our opinions are split on the level of technology in cooking. But one thing's clear: we see ourselves using fresher, healthier food and more traditional cooking.



35%

I will cook in an old-fashioned way, not using a lot of new technology

18%

I will cook with fewer pre-processed foods

11%

I'm worried that there will be too much technology involved in cooking

11%

I will cook from all home-grown produce

10%

I will mainly eat plant-based food

9%

My appliances will do all the cooking based on voice commands

8%

AI will have taken over my kitchen

6%

My wearable devices will determine what/when I eat based on biometric data





# Wrap-up



The way we eat has evolved. Kitchens and living spaces are fluid and meals more flexible. The dining table is no longer the centrepiece. We cook, eat and host on our own terms.

Eating what we want doesn't need to be explained. Pickiness isn't a flaw, but rather a choice. Sometimes it's heritage, sometimes habit, sometimes access. And weird habits remind us that taste is personal. Comfort food for one can be borderline chaos for someone else.

Social pressure still exists. Tight kitchens. Mental comparisons. Expectations. We're winging it but still finding a way. We're also

cooking solo and doing what fits our lives over what others expect. Sharing kitchen space with partners, kids or roomies is an irritation many of us are hiding. But flexibility gets us through.

## **Where we go from here**

Food, cooking and eating is personal and messy, but adaptable. Not spotless. As expected, affordability still shapes what lands on our plate. The future of food will be defined more and more by how we live and not how mealtimes are "supposed" to look.



# Smaklig spis!

Swedish for  
“Enjoy your meal”

IKEA Cooking & Eating Report 2026

