

# Boomer biters, senior snacks: A look at popular foodservice trends among America's seniors

As one of the nation's largest living adult generations, Baby Boomers are a huge slice of the customer pie for foodservice operators. **However, today's seniors crave independence and culinary adventure, and have no intentions of compromising their lifestyles, according to Sharon Olson of the Culinary Visions Panel.**

The good news? Before you rush to overhaul your services, a recent study found that many of the dining and foodservice characteristics boomers want and expect in healthcare and assisted living facilities already exist. Meeting the high standards of today's boomers is often a matter of fine-tuning your operations to keep pace with the trends among this demanding age group.

## **Trend #1: Boomers want a dining experience that allows them to socialize**

**A recent survey from Chicago's Culinary Visions shows that 92 percent of seniors who have yet to join a senior living community agreed that being proud to invite family and friends to dine with them was important.** Moreover, 71 percent of seniors age 65 and older say a clean interior space is very important whenever they're dining away from home, according to research from FSD.

Essentially, with boomers it's important to emphasize a quality experience over a speedy visit. Aesthetics can go a long way in elevating foodservice: from more modern trays and servingware for in-room dining to more on trend décor in retail foodservice applications. Since most retail foodservice in healthcare environments is visible, for example, make sure it has form and function. The same goes for assisted living facilities – the more thought that goes into the aesthetics, the more likely patrons are to spend time there.

## **Trend #2: Boomers want meals from scratch**

Staying ahead of the trend – and keeping senior patrons happy – also means using cooking to order. Seniors tend to get bored with a lack of variety, so developing food options that today's seniors find interesting and attractive is the name of the game – one that Robert J. Darrah, Director of Dining services at Legacy Retirement Communities in Lincoln, Neb., played well, and saw large and favorable responses to.

Darrah expanded his menu from two offerings to a 3-page, fold-out menu with about 14 items, including three main entrees, 11 optional entrees – including prime rib, lobster tail, crab legs and fresh salmon daily – three starch accompaniments, salads, vegetables, soups and desserts.

The best tools for creating these made-from-scratch meals include corresponding prep equipment and space, i.e. cooklines that include a griddle, char grill, fryers, stove tops and convection ovens. Time-saving equipment is a worthwhile investment in kitchens that focus on made-from-scratch as well. Look for high-quality, multipurpose equipment like food processors precise enough yield high-quality coarsely-chopped veggies for stews, but powerful enough to blend and puree veggies used for soups and sauces – or residents who require pureed food. Additionally, consider equipment that reduces labor – such as a vegetable washer or easy to clean juicers.

### **Trend #3: More Boomers are leaning toward fresh, nutritious options**

In addition to craving variety and customization, many of today's seniors are health-conscious, with a desire to be nutritionally savvy. Some facilities – like St. Andrews Estates in Boca Raton, Fla., use menus that provide residents with nutritional values, including fat, sodium and sugar contents.

Additionally, local sourcing is a growing trend across the board, and it's a great, easy way to delight residents, patients and visitors. Keep in mind that using more fresh, local ingredients could require more prep space or equipment; storage is another consideration – look for clear storage bins and an efficient labeling system – which allow for easier visibility to monitor freshness. Specialty storage bins – such as those with drainage to wick away moisture from fruits and veggies – also are available.

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