

Incoming seniors: 5 ways “new” seniors will shake up foodservice

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Seniors who haven't yet moved into a senior living community have a different outlook than current residents. The latest **Senior Food and Lifestyles study by Culinary Visions Panel** asked 500 “new” seniors what they're leery about in terms of their dining future.



The baby boomers may be getting older, but this generation isn't fading away; they're enjoying a higher quality of life than ever before, even as many prepare to move into senior living communities. Surveys of seniors currently living in senior communities have shown high levels of satisfaction with the food. But “new” seniors—starting at age 55—are apprehensive about what will be on tap when and if the time comes to move into senior living.

“Aging baby boomers are driving pressure for higher senior living standards, particularly when it comes to food,” says **Sharon Olson, executive director of Culinary Visions Panel**.

Here are five ways we could see that happening.

Menu fatigue and institutional food

Through personal interviews with 50 “new” seniors who live on their own now, the study found that the seniors had **negative perceptions toward dining options in senior living communities**. The main concerns were: menu fatigue (the same menu repeated week after week) and uninspired foodservice due to the perception of an institutionalized setting. “Senior living communities will have to take on this challenge of assuring ‘new’ seniors that their dining options are interesting and attractive,” the study concluded.

Focus on fresh foods, uptick in fruit and vegetable love

The study also revealed a keen **focus on fresh foods**. No canned green beans for this crowd. When prompted to list their favorite foods for dinner, 31 percent of “new” seniors named vegetables, as opposed to only 19 percent of seniors who currently reside in a senior living community. The gap was even larger for fruit: 35 percent of “new” seniors crave it, while only 21 percent of current residents do.

This is the dinner party generation

Baby boomers grew into adulthood by hosting dinner parties in their homes and learning French cooking techniques to wow their friends. They don't want to let go of this when they move to senior living. Having food that makes them **“proud to invite their family and friends”** was important to 92 percent of the “new” seniors surveyed. Right now, 73 percent of current senior residents believe the same thing. Not only will social occasions and family-friendly dining with impressive selections attract seniors to a community, it will keep them happier once they move in. Also, more visits from non-residents can translate into more revenue if the food is an attractive option.

Variety, snacks are a big deal

Foodservice options that feed “new” seniors’ craving for independence and social interaction will be key. And 83 percent say that **access to snacks is important**, compared with 71 percent of current residents. They want easy access to restaurants, cafes, retail markets, bistros and room service, the study found. This could ultimately affect the way senior dining facilities are designed and built.

Takeaway

In summary, “While it may seem that ‘new’ seniors are consumers with higher expectations,” the study states, “many of the dining and foodservice characteristics that they desire already exist in most senior living communities. Further developing these programs that emphasize **quality dining, healthy foods and snacking options**...will increase the senior living community’s attraction to the incoming senior population.”