

# The Mindful Dining Initiative: The Evolving Definition Of Healthfulness

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Consumer interest in health and wellness has been a mega trend for several years. There is no doubt produce plays an important role in consumers' desires related to their wellbeing. New consumer research from Culinary Visions sheds light on an evolving definition of health and indulgence among modern consumers that points to opportunity for the produce industry.

The Mindful Dining Initiative is a project that began in 2014 and is an on-going body of work. Its objective is to explore the psychology of food and beverage choices made by consumers away from home. The latest study in the project was completed in late 2018 and included 2,000 consumers in the United States, Italy, France, the United Kingdom and Germany. Participants in the survey were queried about balancing health and indulgence when dining away from home.

Restaurant dining has long been considered an opportunity to indulge and leave dietary concerns at home. To that end, 86 percent of Americans agreed that going out is a time to treat oneself, and more than half (53 percent) of those surveyed would rather not see the calories listed on the menu.

Eating away from home has become an expected aspect of everyday life, and there is continued pressure on foodservice establishments to offer more healthful choices. Eighty-six percent of Americans surveyed said they enjoy U.S. fast food, and 70 percent think big U.S. restaurant chains have healthy options.

Indulgence today, is about quality of ingredients and having delicious and healthful options available. Eighty-nine percent of U.S. consumers said they care about the quality of ingredients in their meals, and 69 percent said making healthy choices is important to them. Rather than depriving themselves of indulgence, 66 percent of Americans say they balance indulgence with physical activity.

Traditional thinking among restaurant patrons was that one had to compromise on taste when choosing healthy meals and snacks away from home. In this study, less than half (43 percent) of the consumers surveyed



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believed menu items billed as healthy usually don't taste great.

Much of the credit for the movement in this perception goes to professional cooking technology and imaginative, forward thinking chefs experimenting with new more aggressive, cooking methods for produce. For example, a combination oven can roast vegetables as easily as it steams them providing more flavorful options to move produce front and center on restaurant menus.

Another study of 1,500 consumers earlier in 2018 delved into culinary lifestyles of mainstream consumers. When it comes to vegetarian and vegan lifestyles, there is more admiration than practice of these lifestyle diets. Sixty percent of consumers aged 18-34 said they admire meat-free lifestyles, and 56 percent went so far as to say they admired the vegan lifestyle. Yet the majority of those who participated in the study were decisively carnivores, with 82 percent saying they love meat.

There is big interest in incorporating more fruits and vegetable into omnivorous diets. Eighty-eight percent of consumers say

they want to get more fruits in their diets and 87 percent want more vegetables. The opportunity for produce to play a starring role in menu items is clear — it has moved well beyond the status of side dish to center of the plate. Produce also helps foodservice operations feed Americans' desires for large portions with healthy and affordable choices. Seventy percent of those surveyed said they love restaurants that offer larger meal servings.

Consumers are ditching diets in favor of an enlightened approach to overall wellness. More than half (53 percent) of consumers say they are not interested in dieting, and 85 percent say they think people get too caught up in food fads. Sixty-six percent say eating food they feel good about is more important than watching their weight.



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