

Consumer interest in diet foods getting slimmer?

LONDON, UK: As January begins, and many resolute Brits aim to curb the excesses of the festive period by eating healthily, it seems not everyone will be adding diet foods to their shopping list. Indeed, latest research from Mintel reveals some 60% of Brits today say they prefer food that is naturally low in fat or calories and two thirds (63%) of consumers who have dieted over the past three years have done so using reduced calorie foods.



However, it seems just over a quarter (27%) of consumers do not find low-calorie foods as filling and a further quarter (27%) claim they end up eating more of them as a result.

Portion size is another concern for consumers buying diet foods, with almost three quarters of consumers (73%) claiming smaller pack sizes are often more expensive per unit. Instead, two fifths (41%) of consumers, prefer to eat smaller portions of regular food items to exercise their own portion control while continuing to eat the same regular food items they enjoy. Furthermore, while 38% consumers say low-fat food has improved in taste and quality recently, over half (54%) consumers claim to be more interested in taste than calorie or fat content. A sceptical 48% of consumers also feel that low-fat foods are not as healthy as they seem and 44% are concerned about the safety of some of the sweeteners used in diet foods.

Vivianne Ihekweazu, senior food and drink analyst at Mintel, said: "While manufacturers have been active in developing new product lines, consumers still take issue with the taste of many reduced calorie food items, and also feel that portion sizes of low-calorie foods leave them feeling hungry, leading them to overeat. The recent response from industry to this has seen a raft of new product launches that promise to keep consumers feeling full for longer."

"Consumers appear to be dispassionate about some aspects of the diet food sector, but demand is still there to be cultivated. Given that two fifths of consumers consider their diet to be healthy, and just under a fifth claim to always choose light foods, the challenge for retailers will be to ensure that they offer consumers a broad range of healthy eating products to encourage them to buy more products from across the healthy eating ranges more regularly." Vivianne continues.

Steady growth

Foods with a weight control claim made up 27% of new food product launches in 2010 - up from 18% in 2009. Low, no or reduced fat made up the majority of claims within weight control foods in the past year - with 62% of weight control foods making this claim. Low, no or reduced calorie was the next biggest claim with 39%, followed by no additives/preservatives with 30% and microwavable with 26%. Low, no or reduced trans fat claims accounted for 19% of weight control foods launched in the past year.

The UK market for reduced calorie foods has continued to experience steady growth driven by innovation in the licensed food category. Between 2008 and 2009, value sales of reduced calorie foods increased by 1.8% to reach £2.1 billion (about R23.1 billion) while slimming aids grew by 6.2% over this period to reach £102 million (about R1.12 billion). It seems the main grocery multiples have responded to consumer demand for low-calorie foods by stocking a broad range of products, with estimated retail distribution of reduced calorie foods up over 10% from 2006, with value now standing at £1.6 billion (about R17.6 billion).

Just over a third of Brits admit that they have been on a diet in the last three years and just under two million consumers belonging to a slimming club. Indeed, it seems Brits remain preoccupied with their weight, with just under a third (30%) of consumers admitting that they are on a continuous quest to lose weight. Mintel's research also reveals that the top five reasons for dieting are: 'to lose weight' with 89% of consumers stating this as the motivating factor, followed by 'to be more healthy' (50%), 'to make myself more attractive' (31%), 'to control my cholesterol level' (27%) and 'to maintain weight' (17%). A further 14% Brits say they have started a diet to control their blood sugar levels and 3% because of a food allergy or intolerance.

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