

by A. Elizabeth Sloan

## New Ways to Achieve Weight Loss

The battle of the bulge continues. Nearly eight in 10 consumers (78%) are trying to lose or maintain weight, according to the 2009 *Food & Health Survey* from the International Food Information Council (IFIC). Two-thirds (67%) of food shoppers in the 2008 *Shopping for Health* survey from the Food Marketing Institute (FMI) reported that their food purchase decisions were influenced by weight. Clearly, foods and beverages positioned to promote weight loss represent an important market target for product developers.

But the ways in which consumers approach weight loss appears to be changing. Only one in 10 (9%) of those who are trying to lose weight are on a specific diet plan/regimen, reports IFIC. Dietary “stimulants” and complete nutritional weight loss supplements—with sales down 12%—are giving way to appetite suppressants, with sales up 7% for the year ending (YE) 12/27/08, Nielsen Co.’s *Strategic Planner* reports.

Changing the amount and the types of foods eaten are the most popular weight-loss strategies, according to IFIC. Consumers also are opting for “better-for-you” foods vs diets. According to Nielsen Co. data, sales of products carrying low-fat claims jumped 9% to \$48 billion and sales of reduced-calorie foods were up 9% to \$12 billion for YE 12/27/08.

The current motivation to lose weight is closely associated with reducing body fat, which is creating a new mainstream market for sports nutrition-derived products that aid in muscle toning, body sculpting, and composition. With aging baby boomers the most likely to be trying to lose weight, and 75% of consumers citing “body shape” as a major concern of aging, according to Experian/Simmons Market Research, an anti-aging angle

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for weight-loss products will have high appeal.

High-protein powders and ingredients that convert fat to muscle, such as conjugated linolenic acid and L-carnitine, will move center stage. The low-fat segment will also continue to benefit. More than one-third of consumers (34%) think calories from fat are the most likely to cause weight gain, up 8% since 2006, according to IFIC. While fat burners have been an ongoing trend in the supplement market, they remain a niche market in the functional foods arena. Green tea, guarana, and green coffee extract are among the popular fat-burning ingredients.

Foods and beverages that claim appetite suppression, lasting satisfaction, sustained energy, or hunger

control represent another new direction in the war on weight. IFIC’s report found that 70% of consumers strongly/somewhat believe that foods can provide satiety; 35% are already eating foods for this effect; and 50% are interested in trying them. Blood sugar control as a weight-loss tool is another new mass market opportunity, according to Sloan Trends’ *TrendSense* model. With lack of energy a barrier for 31% who are trying to lose

weight and a motivator for 48%, according to IFIC, it’s not surprising that combination energy/weight-control foods and beverages are arriving on the global weight-loss scene.

Targeting dieting consumers who are trying to reduce their use of medication or their risk of developing a health problem is an untapped opportunity for food marketers. Keep in mind that one in three adults is afflicted by high blood pressure, according to the Centers for Disease Control, and more than 65 million Americans have high blood cholesterol, reports the National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute.

Products to promote weight loss among kids and teens also have good marketplace potential. According to Mintel’s 2008 study, *Kids & Teens Eating*

*Habits*, 30% of teenagers 12–17 often try to lose weight. With 28% of parent food shoppers in FMI’s report admitting they had an overweight child and the Academy of Pediatrics mandating weight management as part of the yearly physical, more parents will likely take action. In 2004, the National Institutes of Health, American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Heart Association agreed that low-fat diets were safe for children over age 4.

The *Global Weight Management Market Report* from Markets and Markets predicts that sales of weight management products will grow from \$363 billion in 2009 to \$586 billion by 2014. Half (50%) of consumers in 52 countries surveyed by the Nielsen Co. in 2009 consider themselves overweight; 78% said they were changing their eating habits to control weight. The World Health Organization reports that, globally, 1.6 billion people are overweight and 400 million are obese. While the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development cites the United States and Mexico as the “fattest countries,” the emphasis on body image in the Asia Pacific makes this a promising market, as well. **FT**



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