

by A. Elizabeth Sloan

Diet Hopping

Experimenting with a variety of diets and eating plans is among the latest trendy consumer behaviors aimed at healthier eating. According to the Hartman Group's *Health + Wellness 2019*, half of adults have tried a new diet or eating approach in the past year, up from 40% who did so in 2017.

Young adults were the most likely to do so; that breaks out to 69% of Gen Z and 65% of Millennials versus 42% of Gen X and 34% of Baby Boomers. Health/wellness has replaced weight control as the top reason to try a new diet or eating regimen.

Among the 50% who have experimented with a diet/eating plan during the past year, 12% have tried a low-carb regimen; 9% each have tried a dairy-free/lactose-free diet, intermittent fasting, or a gluten-free plan; 8%, the Mediterranean diet; 7%, the Whole30 diet or a juice/detox cleanse; 6%, Weight Watchers; and 5% each, the elimination, ketogenic or paleo diet, per Hartman.

But what is different from previous dieting behaviors is that only 3% of those who tried a diet stayed on a specific diet/eating plan exclusively. Rather, they interchanged them, often by eating occasion or daypart to meet their personal diet plans or spur-of-the-moment nutritional needs, per Hartman.

At the same time, diets/eating plans have become a tool to help support consumers' personal goals beyond simply

healthier eating, especially for young adults, who seek to eliminate food sensitivities and/or have concerns about sustainability, climate, and animal welfare.

Of the 50% who tried an eating plan last year, 9% tried a vegetarian plan and 6% a vegan diet, per Hartman. One in 10 describes their eating as flexitarian (mostly vegetarian with some animal protein).

The International Food Information Council's (IFIC) *2019*

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Food & Health Survey reported that of the 38% who followed a diet in the past year, 10% did so for clean eating and 7% to be gluten-free.

In reality, these diets appeal to a very small core base of consumers. But are diet labels, such as gluten-free, high-protein, and keto, useful triggers to help consumers identify the foods they want to be eating as part of their healthful eating plan? According to Datassential's *2019 New Healthy Keynote Report*, nearly two-thirds of adults are simply "not interested" in the keto, paleo, Whole30, or Atkins diet.

Although paleo is the lead commercial diet descriptor in restaurants, it appears on only 0.7% of U.S. menus, which is up 13% over the past year; the keto diet appears on just 0.2%. While diners give these diets high marks for uniqueness,

Datassential reports they get relatively low scores for purchase intent.

The American Frozen Food Institute's *2019 Power of Frozen* report notes that 13% of food shoppers are buying more frozen foods to try a new diet versus 65% who are doing so for greater convenience.

Two-thirds of food shoppers never look for trendy diet friendliness when buying fresh prepared foods, per FMI's *2019 Power of*

benefits beyond weight control (e.g., energy, anti-inflammation, or gut health), that include cutting-edge culinary fare, and have well-recognized, substantiated medical support will continue to find a welcome market.

In January 2019, *U.S. News & World Report* published an expert review of the top 41 diets, naming the Mediterranean diet the best diet overall, followed by the DASH and flexitarian eating plans. Weight Watchers was ranked as

the best weight-loss diet. Only 8% want recipes to help meet these diet plans.

With nearly everyone having his or her own personalized eating style, wouldn't it be a good idea to simply call out the products' characteristics/ingredients rather than having to learn and remember what each diet moniker represents? With 63% of consumers interested in more protein; 32% interested in gluten-free; 32%, vegetarian; and 28%, vegan foods, per Datassential, why not just label or promote foods accordingly?

Are diets dead? No, but going forward, eating plans must be contemporized and integrated into an active healthy lifestyle to be sustainable. After all, per Mintel's *2019 Diet Trends & Fads*, 120 million U.S. adults are still trying to lose weight.

Programs that deliver health

the best weight-loss diet.

The Mediterranean diet was cited as best for diabetes, best for healthy eating, and easiest diet to follow. The keto diet ranked 31st out of 41; the paleo diet was 38th.

Lastly, the opportunity for healthier lifestyle programs is even larger. Globally, 12% of consumers are on a low-sugar regimen; 10%, low-calorie; 9%, low-carbohydrate; 8% each, high protein or halal; 6%, vegetarian; 5% each, high-fat, intermittent fasting, or gluten-free; 4% each, pescatarian or dairy-free; and 3% each, raw food, vegan, or grain-free, per Euromonitor's *2019 Global Health & Nutrition Survey*. **FT**



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