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Dinner Is Lone Holdout in Eroding Mealtime Rituals

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BELLEVUE, Wash. — The word "dinner" tends to conjure a specific image of a family gathered around a table. At a time when various factors have undermined "traditional" mealtime routines, dinner is the lone holdout to eroding mealtime rituals and continues to serve as America's "main" meal, according to a new report from The Hartman Group, a consultancy on demand-side strategy to the food and beverage industry.



Transformation of the American Meal 2017 reveals that dinner is the meal most likely eaten at all; is the least likely to be skipped; planned furthest in advance; eaten with others; and focused on enjoyment of both food and company. The contrast between reality and the ideal is most salient to consumers at dinnertime.

Most consumer planning focuses on dinner, as it is the meal with the most potential inputs. However, this doesn't mean people enjoy all aspects of planning and cooking. Planning for dinner, which is typically the most important meal of the day, requires more thought. Dinner also has the biggest set of options when it comes to eat. More than four in 10 consumers (43 percent) do not look forward to deciding what's for dinner.

"Traditions or assumptions about mealtimes no longer hold true," said Hartman Group CEO Laurie Demeritt. "Shopping for food, dining out and planning what to eat have all changed dramatically in the past few decades as American food culture has shifted to prioritize, on the one hand, greater customization to personal tastes and needs — especially through healthier, fresher, less processed food — and on the other hand, our continuing and undiminished desire for convenience, variety and good value."

The full report is a comprehensive examination of the factors shaping the American meal today that provides implications for stakeholders in the food, beverage, food retail, restaurant, and food service industries, according to the Hartman Group.

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