

Dinner: The American Mealtime Ritual's Last Stand

Snacking may be eating away at breakfast and lunch routines, but a new report by The Hartman Group finds consumers still cling to the ideal of dinner as the “main” meal.

Bellevue, WA — Mention the word “dinner” and our mind envisions a set of people gathered around a table. The words “family dinner” narrows that vision onto a mom, a dad and, usually, two or more kids. A new report by [The Hartman Group](#), a leading consultancy on demand-side strategy to the food and beverage industry, provides illuminating new insights into the factors that have undermined “traditional” mealtime routines and explains why dinner is the lone holdout to these eroding mealtime rituals and is America’s “main” meal.

Dinner is still 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, according to The Hartman Group’s [Transformation of the American Meal 2017](#) report. The contrast between reality and the ideal is most salient to consumers at dinnertime.

Most consumer planning focuses on dinner, because it is the meal with the most potential inputs, but it doesn’t mean people necessarily enjoy all aspects of dinner planning and cooking. Planning for dinner, typically the most important meal of the day, requires more thought, and for many this makes it less enjoyable. In addition to coordinating schedules, duties and ingredients, dinner also has the largest set of options when it comes to what to eat. About four in ten consumers (43 percent) *do not look forward to* “deciding what’s for dinner.”

“Traditions or assumptions about mealtimes no longer hold true,” says Laurie Demeritt, CEO of The Hartman Group. “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.”

About Transformation of the American Meal 2017 Report

[Transformation of the American Meal 2017](#) is a comprehensive examination of the factors shaping the American meal today and provides implications for stakeholders in the food, beverage, food retail, restaurant, and food service industries. The report explores how traditional notions of the mealtime and meals have evolved — and what remains the same.

About The Hartman Group

[The Hartman Group](#) is a leading provider of custom consumer research, predictive analytics, trend-forward insights and consulting solutions to companies across the broad spectrum of the food and beverage industry that help solve problems and grow their business. Since 1989, The Hartman Group’s anthropologists, social scientists and business analysts have been immersed in the study of American food and beverage culture, using ethnographic observation, quantitative tracking surveys and deep study of trends. What we have learned and continue to uncover allows us to upend many notions of our traditional American eating and drinking patterns, thereby identifying unique opportunities and winning strategies for our clients. For more information, visit www.hartman-group.com

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