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Insights into the Overweight Research helps firm up retail dietitian programs

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Most Americans are overweight, more accepting of once stigmatizing terms like 'obese.'

As summer approaches and many consumers redouble their weight loss efforts, research offers new insights to help retail dietitians firm up related plans and programs.

Findings from The Hartman Group's "Weight Management & Healthy Living 2015" report give a glimpse into the overweight consumer mindset and reveal their top weight-loss tactics.

Being Overweight More Acceptable

Most Americans continue to be overweight, with a substantial minority being obese (32 percent) or extremely obese by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) standards. Yet consumers' views on being overweight are changing. There is greater acceptance of being overweight as a society than in the 1950s, when modern dieting culture began, according to the Hartman report. Since most American adults are overweight today (63 percent), being "heavy" is now the social norm and much less stigmatized than in the past. The new enemy for consumers is *obesity*, not simply being *overweight*.

"Over the past 10 years, overweight and/or obese Americans have come to accept their weight status as defined by the CDC," says Laurie Demeritt, CEO of The Hartman Group. "This is a huge shift in self-awareness and in willingness to accept stigmatized terms like 'obese' as personal labels. When individuals accept that they have a problem like obesity, it forms the platform for actual behavioral change."

Consumers Take the Weight of Responsibility

More than half of U.S. consumers (56 percent) are trying to lose weight, according to the report. They continue to see themselves as primarily responsible for their own weight and are more holistic in approaches to managing weight. More than eight in 10 consumers (85 percent) say they are solely responsible for their own weight.

“Optimizing one’s health, especially as one ages, is a primary driver of weight-management behavior,” says Demeritt. “As a result, we have evolved from a weight-management culture of purely crash dieting to a culture more open to permanent dietary alterations along with a set of lifelong healthy guardrails.”

While Americans increasingly see themselves as responsible for their own weight—almost nine in 10 consumers (88 percent) agree with the statement “I am personally responsible for choosing the right foods, not manufacturers” (an increase of five percentage points from 2010)—the belief in the role of genetic predisposition is significant and growing as well. More than one-third of consumers (38 percent) say that genetics is behind their current weight—an increase of eight percentage points from 2010.

Top Weight-Loss Tactics Reveal Common Sense Approaches

Consumers who are trying to lose weight use tactics aligned with the shift toward permanent diet changes and lifelong healthy habits noted by Demeritt.

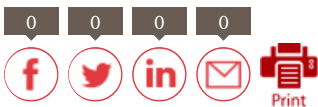
According to the Hartman research, the top three weight-loss tactic are to watch portion sizes (34 percent), control the amount of food (28 percent) and avoid eating late at night (27 percent), followed by limit the amount of junk food (25 percent), watch calories consumed (24 percent) and eliminate/limit snacks and minimize sugar/sweets (21 percent each).

Not surprisingly, consumers are more tuned in to the Nutrition Facts label when watching their weight, with 59 percent almost always or frequently reading it, compared to 42 percent when not watching their weight. The most important label elements checked by those watching their weight are calories, sugars, serving size, total fat and sodium.



About Diane Quagliani

Registered dietitian Diane Quagliani specializes in nutrition communications for consumer and health professional audiences. She has assisted national retailers and CPGs with nutrition strategy, web content development, trade show exhibiting and creation and implementation of shelf tag programs. She’s written extensively for major consumer publications including Better Homes and Gardens, the Los Angeles Times and Chicago Tribune.



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