The Difficult Task of Shedding the Pounds

Contributed by GFK
Thursday, 05 January 2006

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A GfK study on the attitudes of Europeans and US citizens towards dieting, local cuisine and cooking

Nuremberg/Frankfurt, 6 January 2006 - Two in ten European and US citizens have tried to lose weight by following a diet at least once in the past two years. Only one in three succeeded. Most of those embarking on a diet failed to achieve their target according to the "Diet, Cuisine and Cooking" study carried out by GfK Custom Research Worldwide on behalf of the Wall Street Journal Europe.

One in four US citizens, one in five Western Europeans and one in ten people in Central and Eastern European countries started diets in the past two years, aiming to lose weight. One in two said that they had not achieved their target weight or had given up after a few days of dieting. Only around one in three Europeans and fewer than one in four US citizens responded that their diet had been successful.

Behavior differs widely in various countries. The number of Finns and Dutch interested in being slim is above-average, with 36% of Finns and 32% of Dutch indicating that they had started a diet in the past two years. The proportion of people willing to go on a diet might be above-average in the Netherlands, but so is the proportion of those not succeeding: around six in ten Dutch people who intend to lose weight are unsuccessful. This is equally true of the German (66%), Czech (65%) and French (63%) populations.

In the UK and the US, at 27%, the number of those willing to invest some effort in shaping up is also above-average. This cannot be said for Central and Eastern Europeans: only one in ten said that they had started a diet in the past two years. Germans (13%), Austrians (15%) and Spaniards (15%) showed little enthusiasm for dieting.

Women More Interested in Weight than Men

In general, women tend to watch their weight more than men. With 28%, the percentage of Western European women who started a dieting program in the past two years is twice that of Western European men. In the USA, this applies to one in three women, but only one in five men.

Once again, the Finns and the Dutch are above-average: almost 50% of women in Finland and the Netherlands wanted to lose weight in the past two years. This is also true of around 33% of women in Sweden, the UK and the US. The share of women whose dieting efforts remained unsuccessful is higher in Holland (61%) and the US (63%) than in other countries. Among Central and Eastern Europeans, women in the Czech Republic stand out, as an above-average proportion of 25% said that they had done something to reduce their weight. The percentage of women who admit that their diet has been unsuccessful or that they have given it up is highest in the Czech Republic (73%), followed by Hungary (62%).

Among men, the Finns are particularly concerned about their body weight, with 27% expressing a willingness to go on a diet. They are closely followed by US citizens where this applies to 21% of men. Men in Bulgaria and Russia are anti-diet: only 3% of men in each of these countries intended to lose weight by embarking on a dieting program in the past 24 months. In Western Europe, German men are the least willing to diet and Austrians are almost as unwilling, with only 6% and 8% respectively saying that they had started a diet in the period concerned.

US Food Especially High in Calories

The study also revealed that in addition to many people being willing to diet in the USA, many people there also believe that food in the US is particularly high in calories. Four in ten Americans and an equally high proportion of Europeans expressed this view. Most Swedes (76%), French (62%) and Finns (61%) are of the opinion that American food is high in calories. A third of Central and Eastern Europeans believe that their own cuisine is full of calories, while only a fifth believe this to be true of American food. Overall, most people believe that Asian cuisine is the least likely to make you gain weight.

Italians Love Fresh Produce

The cooking habits of citizens in various European countries and the US vary widely. On average, six in ten households consume freshly prepared food every day. The proportion is particularly high in Southern European countries. In Italy, for

example, 90% of the population cooks every day. The picture is very different for the Netherlands, Hungary and the US, where the number of households eating food that has been prepared freshly every day is as low as one in three. In Central and Eastern Europe, the average is home-cooked food six days a week and in the USA, five days a week.

In Western Europe, the age group 50+ tends to cook every day. Three in four respondents in this group prepare their own food seven days a week. In the younger age groups, this applies to around 64% only. Italy is the exception: there are no differences between the age groups. Young or old - nine in ten Italians cook their own food from scratch every day.

The Survey

Citizens from 20 countries were asked about their attitudes towards dieting, local cuisine and cooking for the "Cuisine" study. The questions asked included which cuisine, according to respondents, was most/least likely to make you gain weight, which cuisine was the most overrated (i.e. which cuisine does not live up to its reputation), whether the respondent had ever gone on a diet with the aim of losing weight and on how many days a week the household prepared fresh food. For the current study, which was commissioned by The Wall Street Journal Europe and financially supported by GfK-NÃ¼rnberg e.V., GfK Custom Research Worldwide surveyed 20,795 people aged 15+ from 20 countries in the period September to October 2005.

The GfK Group

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The Wall Street Journal Europe (www.wsj.com)

The Wall Street Journal Europe was established in 1983 and its current daily circulation in Brussels amounts to 86,539 copies (ABC January to June 2005). In addition to The Wall Street Journal Europe, Dow Jones & Company publish The Wall Street Journal (USA), The Wall Street Journal Asia and The Wall Street Journal Online, the biggest subscription-based online news website in the world. Details on the study can be found in the Weekend Journal in today's issue of the Wall Street Journal Europe (January 6, 2006).

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