

Fifteen Percent Of Dieters Are Concerned About Salt Intake

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Consumers are interested in healthy eating more than ever, and Mintel's research reveals that approximately half (52%) of American adults are currently "watching" their diet.

And while 60% report dieting because they want to lose weight, some 15% of dieters claim to be doing so at least in part because of concerns about "salt intake."

Indeed, it appears "sodium watching" is a relevant concern, as more than four in 10 (44%) US consumers claim that they "always" or "usually" consult the Nutrition Facts Panel (NFP) and/or ingredient list to assess sodium levels when considering a food purchase. By contrast, 51% "always" or "usually" look at fat content, while 47% inspect sugar levels, and 49% examine calorie counts "always" or "usually" when shopping.

"The relatively high incidence of dieting in the US is one key factor driving demand for low-sodium products," says Molly Maier, senior health and wellness analyst at Mintel. "Our findings indicate that fat and calorie counts are more likely than sodium to influence purchase. Thus, companies may be able to maximize the appeal of low-sodium foods by also showing, where appropriate, that they are low in fat and calories."

When it comes to sodium, nearly two thirds (62%) of Americans believe that manufacturers are responsible for disclosing how much sodium is in their products, whereas just 35% feel the government is responsible for such disclosures. Eighteen percent see this as the responsibility of retailers.

Despite an interest in disclosures on the part of manufacturers, less than half (46%) feel that manufacturers should implement sodium restrictions, and an even smaller share (34%) feel the government should do so. Customers want to choose for themselves how much sodium they consume and that they generally want to avoid regulation that will limit their food options.

More than half (59%) of respondents "always" or "usually" limit salt consumption when at home, while 44% "always" do so when dining at a restaurant.

"This indicates that while restaurant chains can often benefit from sodium reduction initiatives, they are especially important for manufacturers of packaged foods, including those that make sauces, condiments, and other flavor enhancers often used to prepare meals at home," adds Molly Maier.

Women (80%) are more likely than men (67%) to limit the amount of salt they cook with when dining at home. Hence retail signage and other materials designed to promote low-sodium meal elements such as reduced-sodium bottled sauces should often be directed at women, especially mothers and homemakers.

Consistent with the fact that they tend to be more health-conscious, women (25%) are more likely than men (18%) to state that they "always" consult sodium levels when shopping for foods. Similarly, while 22% of all respondents "always" assess sodium levels when shopping for foods, 32% of 55-64-year-olds report doing so along with 33% of those aged 65+. Thus, foods designed in large part for women and/or mature consumers are among those that should be considered for reformulation.

Meanwhile, there appears to be substantial demand for reduced-sodium packaged foods and restaurant items. When it comes to low salt/sodium foods, 59% indicated that they have tried and would use such foods again in the future. An additional 16% have not tried reduced-sodium packaged foods, but would be interested in trying them.

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