

Tired of Monotony, Young Consumers Seek a Return to More Versatility in Their Diets

CHICAGO – As younger consumers aged 34 and under spend more time at home and indoors during the COVID-19 pandemic, they have more control over their food choices than ever, but have largely fallen into a food rut.

According to a new survey from **Y-Pulse**, with the lack of in-restaurant meals, on-campus dining or social dining events to differentiate day-to-day eating habits, 59 percent of survey respondents agreed with the statement “I find myself eating the same foods every day.” Yet nearly eight in 10 (79 percent) of these young consumers crave the variety they can get when dining out.

They are experiencing monotony in their actual meals but are interested in a return to more versatile options, whether that comes from the restaurants they miss or innovations they are creating for themselves in the kitchen, **Y-Pulse** reported.



“Young consumers are feeling both inspired and exhausted by the conditions of the pandemic,” said **Sharon Olson, executive director of Y-Pulse**. “They’re fluctuating between a need for distraction and a quick fix to their everyday dining needs. That kind of shifting perspective on dining needs to be met with dynamic ideas to captivate young audiences.”

While 57 percent of respondents prefer to purchase fully prepared food over making food from scratch, 62 percent of young consumers disagree with the statement “I do not like to cook.” In fact, cooking is on the rise among consumers who are experiencing an increase in free time due to the pandemic disrupting their day-to-day routines. Seventy-eight percent have found opportunities to explore cooking new recipes during stay-at-home periods and 80 percent have been inspired to learn more cooking techniques during their at-home cooking forays.

In addition to looking for variety in their diets, younger consumers are also vacillating between health foods and indulgent options when they search for comforting foods. Sixty-nine percent pointed to indulgent comfort food as their choice in recent months, while 83 percent are looking forward to returning to healthier eating, which implies that indulgence needs to be balanced with fresh and healthy options.

However, this does not mean that younger consumers are likely to adopt strict dieting rules, as 71 percent agree that a little bit of indulgence was likely to become part of their daily routine and 76 percent say that life is too short to skip dessert. For younger generations, balanced meals are a critical part of self-care and comfort, according to the survey.

Younger consumers also miss social dining events that are currently restricted. Seventy percent say they have missed being around other people when dining in a foodservice establishment, despite their wariness regarding a return to normal social routines. Sixty-five percent say they will be reluctant to return to large food halls or marketplace environments.

With 66 percent looking forward to socializing at the farmers market, finding ways to accommodate open air and outdoor dining can help reinvigorate social dining while maintaining safety protocols, **Y-Pulse** noted.

Although the timeline for reopening is different for everyone, younger consumers haven't forgotten their former favorite restaurants, and the absence of restaurant dining has increased their appreciation for dining out, as 77 percent say they have a greater appreciation for all of the restaurant experiences they used to take for granted and 79 percent agree that chefs have become heroes serving their communities in these difficult times.

Three out of four consumers plan to patronize restaurants that were known for taking care of their employees during the pandemic. In the meantime, the drive-thru window at younger consumers' favorite restaurants feels like home for 48 percent of survey respondents. Regardless of the pandemic, younger consumers will continue to support their favorite eateries.

Headquartered in Chicago, Y-Pulse is a division of Olson Communications Inc. It is a research and consulting practice that specializes in helping companies in the food business better understand tomorrow's tastemakers today.