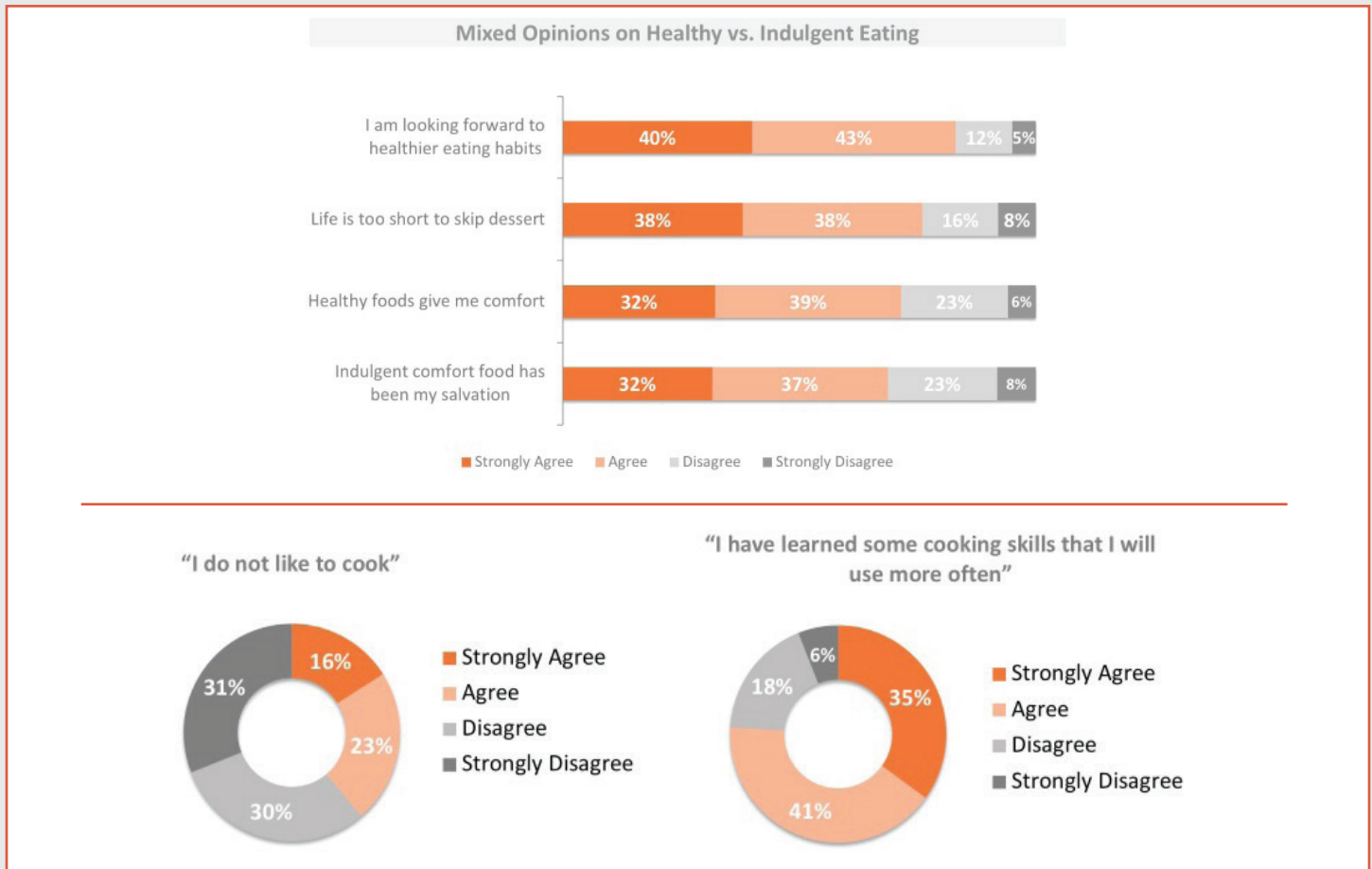


New Y-Pulse study reveals evolving need of pandemic-conscious young consumers



The latest **Y-Pulse survey looks at the dining habits of COVID-era consumers ages 34 and under**, delving into the ways in which pandemic-related restrictions are likely to continue to affect their lives. The study reveals the ways in which foodservice providers can meet young consumers evolving needs.

"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."

Stay at home periods and restricted social activities have driven young consumers indoors and put them in charge of their food choices more than ever. Without in-restaurant meals, on campus dining and social dining events to differentiate their day-to-day eating habits, consumers are stuck in a food rut. 59 percent of **Y-Pulse** survey participants agreed with the statement "I find myself eating the same foods every day," yet 79 percent crave the variety they can get when dining out. Young diners are experiencing an onslaught of monotony in their meals but are interested in a return to having more versatile options, whether that comes from the restaurants they're missing or innovations they're creating for themselves in the kitchen.

While 57 percent of those surveyed prefer purchasing fully prepared foods over making food from scratch, 62 percent of young consumers disagreed with the statement “I do not like to cook.” In fact, cooking seems to be on the rise among consumers who are experiencing an increase in free time as the pandemic disrupts their day-to-day routines. 78 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.

Not only are young consumers looking for a shakeup in their diets, they’re also vacillating between health foods and indulgent options when searching for comforting foods. 69 percent of those surveyed said that indulgent comfort food was their salvation in recent months, yet 83 percent are looking forward to returning to healthier eating, implying that indulgence needs to be balanced with fresh, healthy options. This does not mean, however, that young consumers are about to adopt strict dieting rules. 71 percent agreed 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.

An active social life is a key aspect of many young consumers’ lives and **Y-Pulse** survey participants have made it clear that they’re missing social dining events now restricted due to the pandemic. 70 percent said they have missed being around other people when dining in a foodservice establishment. This craving still comes with some wariness towards a return back to normal social routines. 65 percent of those surveyed said 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 still maintaining safety protocols.

While the timeline for reopening looks different for everyone, young consumers haven’t forgotten about the restaurants they once frequented, and the absence of restaurant dining has increased young diners’ appreciation for dining out. 77 percent say they have a greater appreciation for all of the restaurant experiences they used to take for granted and 79 percent agreed that chefs have become heroes serving their communities in these difficult times. 75 percent plan to patronize restaurants that were known for taking care of their employees during these difficult times. In the meantime, the drive through window at young consumers’ favorite restaurants feels like home for 48 percent of those surveyed. Pandemic or not, young consumers will continue to support their favorite eateries.