

Canadian Restaurant & Foodservice News

Official Magazine of the Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association

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Hungry for health AND GOOD FOOD

Driving topline sales can be easy when giving customers what they want: healthy options



My neighbour Linda tells me that she only eats out once a year – on her birthday. “The food I cook is so much healthier than restaurant food,” explains this foodie who grows her own veggies in the summer and cooks practically everything from scratch.

It turns out that Linda is not alone in her thinking. In a national survey of more than 2,400 Canadians, 70 per cent feel that the food they eat when dining out will not be as healthy as the meals they prepare at home. The survey, conducted in April by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada (HSF), also found that 71 per cent of consumers report being somewhat or very health-conscious when purchasing restaurant menu items.

“My doctor told me to stop having intimate dinners for four, unless there are three other people!”

Orson Welles

That may come as no surprise, given that nutritional and healthy cuisine ranked among the top 10 hot trends in CRFA's 2010 Canadian Chef Survey. To satisfy the appetites of your health conscious customers, consider these four tips.

HIGHLIGHT THE HEALTHY

Healthy eating can sometimes feel like a game of hide and seek. Just over half of Canadians surveyed in the HSF study felt that there are “lots of healthy choices on restaurant menus; people just need to choose them.” So make it as easy as possible for customers to spot the healthy choices. According to the HSF survey, Canadians are most interested in seeing the calorie, fat, trans fat, saturated fat, and sodium count of a menu item.

When announcing the daily specials, have your wait staff point out the healthier and lower calorie entrées. On a menu, identify the healthier fare with a signature logo or participate in a restaurant-labelling program like Health Check. Post the nutrition information for your menu items on your website or have the information posted/readily available at the point of purchase.

SIZE IT DOWN

Every time I think about portion control, I am reminded of the aforementioned quote by the late Orson Welles. In today's supersized environment, it's refreshing to see smaller portions. Smaller meals automatically mean fewer calories, fat, and sodium for the health savvy customer. Think smaller plates, mini burgers, and

bite-sized/mini desserts – interestingly, all cutting edge trends reported in the CRFA's 2010 Canadian Chef Survey. My personal favourite trend is half-sized portions for half the price.

PRICE IT RIGHT

Speaking of price, it often seems that it takes a back seat to health. According to the HSF survey, 41 per cent of Canadians would choose a healthy menu item in a restaurant over a non-healthy menu item even if the healthy choice was more expensive, and 64 per cent would still pick the healthy item if it cost the same price as a non-healthy choice. Knowing that your customers are willing to pay for health, having a variety of healthy items clearly marked can drive top line sales.

SPREAD THE WORD

Finally, engage in some PR or marketing to plug your healthier fare – not only to the public, but also to dietitians and other health educators. I've just received a personal invitation from a PR firm to enjoy a complimentary lunch at the new FOUR restaurant in Toronto's financial district. Driven by nutrition and wellness, the restaurant's chefs have apparently created a guilt-free dining menu with entrées weighing in under 650 calories, and no dessert over 200 calories. With a line-up that includes crab corn cakes, smoked sable fish, and tiramisu (my all time favorite dessert!), I can't wait to give it all a try. They tell me that the tiramisu is a “dessert shot” – how deliciously perfect!

SURVEY

According to a national survey by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, here's the type of nutritional info that ranks top in the minds of health conscious consumers:

- Calories
- Trans fat
- Total fat
- Sodium
- Saturated fat
- Sugar
- Cholesterol
- Fibre
- Protein
- Vitamins/minerals



Arm yourself with more healthy eating tidbits – learn the facts about MSG and how to reduce sodium intake.

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