Majority of US Households Have Someone With Diet Restrictions

PR Newswire

NEW YORK (PRNewswire) — Most Americans (87 percent) say they're making an effort to eat healthy – and with good reason, as a majority say they or someone in their household monitor or restrict their intake of a nutritional component like gluten or sugar, according to a new Harris Poll. Six in ten American adults (60 percent, a slight uptick from 57 percent in 2011) say they restrict at least one nutritional component from their diet.

These are some of the results of The Harris Poll of 2,234 adults surveyed online between March 12 and 17, 2014. (Full results, including data tables, can be found here [1]).

Sugar and salt lead limitations; gluten restrictions grow
Sugar (36 percent, up from 32 percent in 2011) and sodium/salt (36 percent) top the list of ingredients American households have at least one person restricting or monitoring, followed by carbohydrates (22 percent). Over one in ten say they or a member of their household monitors/restricts intake of dairy (13 percent, up from 10 percent in 2011), meat or meat products (also 13 percent, up from 10 percent) and lactose (11 percent). The percentage saying they or someone in their household monitors or restricts gluten intake has nearly doubled over the past three years, to 10 percent today from 6 percent in 2011.

"With six in ten American households having at least one member restricting certain foods from their diet, this raises important implications for the food industry as a whole," says Todd Hale, Senior Vice President Consumer Insights, Nielsen. "We've seen that a restriction for one, especially in the case of allergens and other health risks, can turn into a household ban. This can present both a challenge and an opportunity for retailers and food manufacturers."

Perhaps not surprisingly, Matures (73 percent) are more likely than any other generation (54 percent Millennials, 62 percent Gen Xers, 60 percent Baby Boomers) to say they or someone in their household restrict or monitor intake of at least one of the tested nutritional factors.

"As Americans age, they develop stronger opinions and restrictions around nutritional choices. Those 68 and older are the most likely of all generations to pay close attention to nutritional labels and restrict corresponding dietary choices such as sodium or sugar," said Hale. "Given the number of people, young and old, describing themselves as knowledgeable about food labels and making an effort to eat healthy, these generational divides suggest that actual implementation of change may stem more from necessity than knowledge."

Consumers consider freshness to be top driver for food and beverage purchase decisions

When consumers consider making a food and beverage purchase, freshness is the most important factor, with nine in ten U.S. adults (89%) considering it important.

- Eight in ten say fiber is important (80 percent), while roughly three-fourths say the same for whole grain (77 percent), calories (75 percent), portion size (73 percent) and fat content (73 percent).
- Roughly seven in ten place importance on sodium or salt (71 percent), saturated fat (71 percent) and dairy (69 percent), while roughly two-thirds indicate the same for sugar (68 percent), natural (68 percent) and carbohydrates (67 percent).
- Looking at more specialized nutritional factors, 49 percent place importance on whether food and beverage products are genetically modified, while 45 percent say the same for organic. Nearly four in ten place importance on glycemic index (38 percent), roughly three in ten say the same for lactose (31 percent) and gluten (28 percent), and knowing whether items are vegan is important to just under two in ten (18 percent).

Most of these factors' perceived importance increases among older Americans, though with some exceptions. The percentage placing importance on knowing whether food or beverages are genetically modified hovers at roughly the halfway mark across generations (48 percent Millennials, 51 percent Gen Xers, 49 percent Baby Boomers, 48 percent Matures), while younger Americans are more likely to place importance on whether items are organic (55 percent, 50 percent, 38 percent and 35 percent, respectively), contain lactose (37 percent, 28 percent, 28 percent and 27 percent, respectively) and are vegan (27 percent, 19 percent, 13 percent and 12 percent, respectively).

Looking to diet and/or weight management, roughly eight in ten Americans consider protein (82 percent) and calories (78 percent) to be important considerations, while roughly three-fourths indicate the same for fat (77 percent), whole grain (76 percent), saturated fat (75 percent) and sugar (74 percent). Roughly seven in ten believe carbohydrates (72 percent), cholesterol (70 percent) and sodium (68 percent) are important in this regard, while just over six in ten say the same for hydrogenated oil (62 percent).

- Perceived importance levels again are generally higher among older generations and women.

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Methodology
This Harris Poll was conducted online within the United States between March 12 and 17, 2014 among 2,234 adults (aged 18 and over). Figures for age, sex,

race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, The Harris Poll avoids the words "margin of error" as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in Harris Poll surveys. The data have been weighted to reflect the composition of the adult population. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to participate in our panel, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

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