

## Every 7 Seconds Another Boomer Turns 50

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By Lisa Grace Marr

They skip breakfast more than most and think of snacking as the fourth meal of the day.

They like rice and organics, but also like to sneak a piece of dark chocolate or two. They may be 50, but think of themselves as 38.

That's the conundrum facing companies trying to market to baby boomers, David Foot told a gathering of food industry pundits yesterday.

"There's a guy sitting in a chair eating good quality chocolate (and) thinks he's (in the prime of life). He'll be approaching his 60th birthday with diabetes. That's the challenge."

He was the opening speaker yesterday at the Guelph Food Technology Centre's conference, Designing and Marketing Foods to Boomers.

Just about every industry in Canada is frantically studying the boomers. Their livelihoods depend on it.

Boomers and their kids -- the echo generation -- command 52 per cent of disposable income in Canada.

The front end of the boomer generation is moving into its 50s, but most of Canada's boomers are in their late 40s.

This year, about 10 million boomers will be between 40 and 60.

In the next decade, seniors will outnumber children under 15.

This educated group will suffer weakening eyesight, have money to spend and be worried about their expanding waistlines.

Says Foot, "You always say you don't want to be like your parents, but this particular generation won't be much different from the older people of 40 years ago."

Boomers will, however, have more money to spend, will likely live longer and have more time in retirement to spend that money. Boomers are eager to enjoy retirement.

Marion Chan, director of the food and beverage group at market research firm NPD Group Inc., said boomers are concerned about health and wellness.

They're going on diets and reading labels to avoid certain ingredients.

Saturated fat tops that list.

"I was watching a lady one day in the grocery store trying to read all the labels in the snack aisle," said Chan.

"All of a sudden her face lit up and she said, 'Look, honey, no trans fats. She picked up three bags of potato chips and plopped them in the cart. I'm going to bet those chips never had trans fats anyway.'"

NPD Group has found 35 per cent of snack foods have labelling that makes some kind of claim, up from 31 per cent four years ago.

It's a telling indicator of marketers' awareness of boomers' concerns.

But Chan pointed out that while boomers are concerned about eating healthy foods, they also want food that's convenient.

And fewer boomers are making dinner at home.

Instead, they're opting for the already roasted chickens available at the supermarket or calling Swiss Chalet.

While obesity and diabetes tend to plague older adults, boomers don't want to give up favourite indulgences.

Treats that are packaged in 100s, such as 100-calorie Wolfgang Puck mocha lattes to go.

However, Aynsley Deluce, director of strategy and research at Watt International, adds a proviso.

She said that it's critical for product and package manufacturers to realize boomers aren't a monolithic group.

"You've got to mine for information beyond just a demographic," she said.

She pointed to the company ConAgra Foods, praising its marketing of Golden Cuisine.

This is a line of traditional meals aimed at the sandwich generation, people who are simultaneously caring for elderly parents and children.

"It has really gotten in touch with the sector of boomers who are caring and compassionate people with very little time."

- \* The bulk of Canadian boomers are in their late 40s

- \* They skip breakfast more than they used to (3.1 per cent of boomers skip breakfast, as opposed to 2.9 per cent four years ago)

- \* For boomers, snacking is the fourth meal of the day

- \* Most boomers eat snacks because of taste (48 per cent) but 34 per cent pick a snack for nutrition

- \* As boomers spend less on child care, they spend more on pet care

- \* Rice is on the Top 10 list of side dishes, a huge jump from 10 years ago

- \* Forty-seven per cent spend 15 minutes or less preparing dinner

- \* The number of boomers eating at home has declined from 76 per cent in 2000 to 73 per cent in 2005. They are eating out more and buying home meal replacements (grocery takeout) instead.

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