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Food, Health and the Gen-X Factor: A Generation Concerned About Weight and Relationships Between Diet and Disease

New Study Reveals Unique Food Beliefs and Behaviors of Generation X

(Washington, D.C.)—Generation X got its name because it was considered to be harder to describe or understand—think “planet X” or “the X factor”—than their much-studied Baby Boomer predecessors. With Gen Xers (ages 40 to 55) now in middle age, the International Food Information Council (IFIC) Foundation, in partnership with the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR), released a new survey that examines their food and health attitudes, with a particular focus on their behaviors and perceptions related to diet and cancer risk.

Among the findings: American Gen-X consumers are much more focused on weight loss than other age groups, a strong majority believes that lifestyle factors have at least some impact on the risk of developing cancer, and nearly half say their food and beverage purchases are impacted by whether they might reduce the risk of developing cancer.

“With middle age comes more attention to our health and what we eat,” said Joseph Clayton, CEO of the IFIC Foundation. “Our research suggests that Gen Xers have distinct ideas about the relationships between our diets and diseases that are manifested in their food choices and behaviors.”

The results supplement the IFIC Foundation’s *2019 Food and Health Survey*—released in May—of the broader adult population (ages 18 to 80). It follows earlier in-depth looks at [Baby Boomers](#) and [Millennials](#).

“From our extensive scientific research, we know that around 40% of cancers are preventable and that being at a healthy weight is the single biggest lifestyle step to protect against cancer,” says AICR Director of Nutrition Programs Sheena Patel Swanner. “It’s great to see that the *2019 Food and Health Survey* indicates that nearly half of all Gen X consumers say their purchases are impacted by whether a food/beverage might reduce their risk of developing cancer. Now is a better time than ever to continue to drive the momentum on education/awareness and the link between nutrition and physical activity and its role in cancer prevention and survivorship.”

Cancer Risk Factors into Gen-X Food Choices and Attitudes

Nearly six in 10 (**59%**) of Gen-X consumers think lifestyle choices have a least some impact on the risk of developing cancer, with **33%** saying they have a great impact. Physical activity (**58%**), eating fruits and vegetables (**57%**) and weight loss (**56%**) were the top lifestyle changes Gen Xers believe can decrease the risk of cancer.

Nearly half of Gen X consumers (**48%**) say their purchases are impacted by whether a food or beverage might reduce their risk of developing cancer, although prevention of heart disease, diabetes and other health conditions are also cited at similar levels. Gen-X women, African Americans, and those in better health are all more likely than their respective counterparts to say that cancer prevention impacts food and beverage purchases.

Of those who say cancer risk has a great impact on their food and beverage purchases, **57%** said their diet is extremely or very different from 10 years ago vs. **25%** of whom say cancer risk has little or no impact on their food decisions.

Gen Xers were also asked about the sources they trust most to learn about the potential links between diet and the risk of developing cancer: **31%** chose a health care professional, and **27%** said they trusted health organizations that focus on cancer, such as the American Institute for Cancer Research. Other sources, such as websites, government agencies and friends/family, trailed far behind.

A Weighty Matter for Generation X

What's on the mind of Gen X? Their waistlines. One-third (**33%**) of Generation-X consumers report having followed a specific eating pattern or diet during the past year, with the most popular being intermittent fasting (**8%**), clean eating (**6%**), gluten-free (**6%**) and low-carb (**6%**).

Gen Xers are much more likely than others to be following a diet with the purpose of losing weight (**64%** vs. **51%** of the general population) or to improve their physical appearance (**53%** vs. **40%**).

Four in 10 (**40%**) of Gen Xers say their diet is very different or extremely different from what it was 10 years ago, about the same as the general population (**39%**). For those who say their diet is extremely different now, the most common response was limiting sugar intake (**20%**), followed by eating fewer carbs (**16%**) and eating more fruits and vegetables (**14%**).

More than half (**54%**) report trying to eat healthy in general, and one-quarter (**23%**) of Gen Xers look for specific health benefits from food. While that is the same number as the broader population, Gen Xers seek certain benefits – like cardiovascular health - in greater numbers than other adults. For instance, **59%** sought out heart and cardiovascular benefits (vs. **48%** of all other age groups). More than one-third (**36%**) looked for the benefits of cancer protection or prevention.

Gen Xers rated fiber (**88%**) and whole grains (**80%**) as the healthiest, followed by plant-based proteins (**76%**) and omega-3 fatty acids (**71%**). Women were more likely than men to rate omega-3's, pro- and prebiotics and unsaturated fats to be healthy.

Methodology

The results were derived from an online survey of 1,022 Gen-X Americans, ages 40-55, conducted March 22 to April 9, 2019. Results were weighted to ensure that they are reflective of the American age 40-55 population, as seen in the 2018 Current Population Survey. Specifically, they were weighted by age, education, gender, race/ethnicity and region. The survey was conducted by Greenwald & Associates, using Dynata's (formerly known as ResearchNow) consumer panel.

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About International Food Information Council Foundation

The mission of International Food Information Council Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, is to effectively communicate science-based information on health, food safety and nutrition for the public good. The IFIC Foundation is supported primarily by the broad-based food, beverage and agricultural industries. To learn more, visit www.foodinsight.org.

About AICR

Our Vision: *We want to live in a world where no one develops a preventable cancer.*

Our Mission: *The American Institute for Cancer Research champions the latest and most authoritative scientific research from around the world on cancer prevention and survival through diet, weight and physical activity, so that we can help people make informed lifestyle choices to reduce their cancer risk. We have contributed over \$108 million for innovative research conducted at universities, hospitals and research centers across the country. Find evidence-based tools and information for lowering cancer risk, including AICR's Recommendation for Cancer Prevention, at www.aicr.org.*