

## The 5 A Day Gap: An Opportunity for Quick-Service

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Your mom was right. There is value in fruits and vegetables, in the guise of increased customer loyalty and higher check averages.

A growing number of today's consumers want to eat healthier, and for many of these consumers this translates into eating more fruits and vegetables and fewer high-calorie, nutrient-poor foods. And for good reason. In a confusing food environment filled with fad diets and magic pills, one thing the public health gurus can agree on is that eating a colorful variety of at least five servings of fruits and vegetables daily is the cornerstone of a healthy diet.

The challenge is that few Americans are actually achieving five servings a day. In fact, only 20 percent make the cut, and most consumers average only about 3.6 servings a day (not including French fries and potato chips). Despite Mom's best efforts to ensure her family has healthy food choices, families do the worst; the folks with the most time on their hands, empty nesters and seniors, do the best. Just 13 percent of American families eat the recommended servings versus 22 percent of singles, 27 percent of empty nesters, and 39 percent of seniors. There you have the "5 A Day gap"—the difference between actual and recommended minimum fruit and vegetable consumption.

So what's up? Consumers are clearly in the habit of eating fruits and vegetables. Ninety-eight percent of consumers surveyed by NPD Foodworld eat fruits and veggies at home regularly. Yet, less than 50 percent of consumers actually eat fruits and veggies when they dine out. According to NPD's research, consumers who eat fruits and vegetables when they eat out are more likely to dine out than their counterparts.

With Americans looking more and more to quick-service for their meals and snacks, closing the 5 A Day gap spells O-P-P-O-R-T-U-N-I-T-Y for quick-serve operators. Yet, here too there is a performance gap. While

13 percent of meals are eaten in restaurants, only 7 percent of average annual fruit and vegetable "eatings" are consumed there. That means the foodservice industry is missing sales opportunities.

### The Menu Gap

So, consumers want to eat fruits and vegetables, but they aren't getting them away from home. This sales opportunity should be of particular interest to the quick-service segment, since two-thirds of consumers report they eat at a quick-serve restaurant at least once every two weeks, yet only 18 percent of them regularly consume a fruit or vegetable there.

Why? While restaurants' fruit and vegetable offerings have improved over the past year, evidence suggests there is plenty of opportunity to expand the average menu, including quick-service. Fruit menu mentions increased 18 percent between 2002 and 2003, while vegetable menu mentions were up 5 percent, according to Food Beat Inc.'s study of the top 200 chains' menus. However, more than 50 of the 200 chains didn't mention fruit at all, and 41 percent of fruit menu mentions were desserts. While menu mentions of vegetables were seven times higher than fruit mentions in the survey, the majority of this growth comes from the explosion in entrée salads.



With the proven success of salads in quick-service, savvy marketers are already working on the next items to satisfy the customer's continuing desire for healthy eating options.

### At School

Kids really do like fruits and vegetables. Thousands of Florida students are living proof.

Non-profit Produce for Better Health recently conducted a school foodservice pilot project to determine the best ways to increase kids' consumption of fruits and vegetables at school. The pilot was a huge success; fruit and vegetable consumption went up in all schools in the program, with some children eating as much as 31 percent more fruits and vegetables.

The pilot enhanced and expanded salad bars and salad options, and other fruit and vegetable offerings in 12 Florida schools, funded by a grant from the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. The pilot was supported by a comprehensive promotional program that included a variety of collateral materials featuring "5 A Day The Color Way" messages. Promotional events, in-class nutrition education, taste tests, and innovative offerings of both familiar and new fruits and vegetables helped increase kids' consumption.

For more information on the school pilot program, visit [www.5aday.org/html/industry/floridasalad.php](http://www.5aday.org/html/industry/floridasalad.php).

customers just waiting to be cultivated.

What does this gap in consumer expectations mean? Increasing customer satisfaction with more and better fruit and vegetable offerings could mean more repeat sales. One-quarter of consumers report they would eat at a quick-service restaurant more often if there were a broader fruit and vegetable selection. No one in the food chain—operator, distributor, or supplier—can afford to ignore that repeat business opportunity.

### Opportunities to Close the Gaps

Based on the research presented by PBH, the foodservice industry representatives recently considered ideas to close the 5 A Day opportunity gap. Some of the key ideas:

- Embrace Mom, the nutrition-conscious consumer.** Quick-service should embrace Mom, the key core health-conscious female audience that cares about nutrition. She wants more fruits and vegetables and will eat out more often if she can get them. She is also the food and nutrition gatekeeper for her family, so she is the one deciding where the family is going to eat. General nutrition was cited most often as what drives her menu selection, rather than attention to specific dietary concerns such as low-calorie, low-fat, or low-carb. How do you reach Mom? Make sure you have healthy food options available, and promote them to her. She will buy them—then come back for more. Mom is more likely to order a side

### The Customer Expectations Gap

How do consumers feel about their fruit and vegetable menu options when they dine out? One-third of consumers told Produce for Better Health (pbh) -that they are satisfied with restaurant fruit and vegetable offerings, while nearly as many—30 percent—feel there isn't enough variety, and only 12 percent rated variety offerings as good. At first glance, it appears that there aren't any glaring problems, but upon digging deeper, it appears that this is a false sense of security based on low expectations from consumers who historically have had few fruit and vegetable options on the menu.

Lack of satisfaction is highest among nutrition-conscious consumers. This consumer demographic is female, most likely to have kids under the age of 16, well educated, and in the middle to upper income brackets—call her Mom. Moms want to feel better about their family's food choices. The HALE Group research found that moms perceive the nutritional value of kids' menu choices to be low, and they don't feel good about that. Further, consumers' perceptions of restaurants as offering nutritious food choices are poor; consumers rarely listed nutritious menu choices as a motivating factor in choosing a restaurant. Yet, once they got inside, almost 20 percent of consumers cited nutrition as their most important factor in deciding what to order from the menu—that's a significant portion of

or starter salad, or an entrée salad with a protein, so think about testing line extensions with limited-time offering (lto) salads. The HALE Group asked consumers to “build” their ideal salad, and 22 percent of the consumers who are regular quick-service diners reported that they would eat at a restaurant more often if they could get “their” salad. Plain iceberg won’t cut it anymore; they want a variety of ingredients and healthy, good tasting salad dressings. Above all, taste is the customer’s top criteria in deciding what to order, so healthy must also taste good.

**Focus on fruit, where the biggest menu gap exists.**

Fruits are Mother Nature’s idea of an ideal treat—tasty, sweet, and good for you. And the vast array of fruits on the market today means virtually limitless menu development opportunities for quick-service. When making your choices, remember that taste, variety, quality, and freshness are key consumer satisfaction drivers. Consumers reported they don’t want soggy or over-processed fruit. PBH research indicates that there are opportunities to increase fruit offerings at every daypart. Perceived value is a must. Consumers will not pay “restaurant” prices for what they can get for less at their local supermarket. Collaborate with local growers to provide a seasonal variety of locally grown foods. LTOs are ideal for highlighting that local bounty.

- **Colorize your kids’ menu.** Menu research shows that children’s menus are particularly lacking in healthy fruit and vegetable choices. Use special, kick-off, promotional sampling to introduce kids to the new, colorful variety of fruits and vegetables on the kids’ menu. Fresh-cut apple slices (McDonald’s), mandarin oranges (Wendy’s), and a colorful fresh-cut fruit medley salad (Chick-fil-A) are just some of the fruit offerings now appearing on leading quick-service menus nationwide.

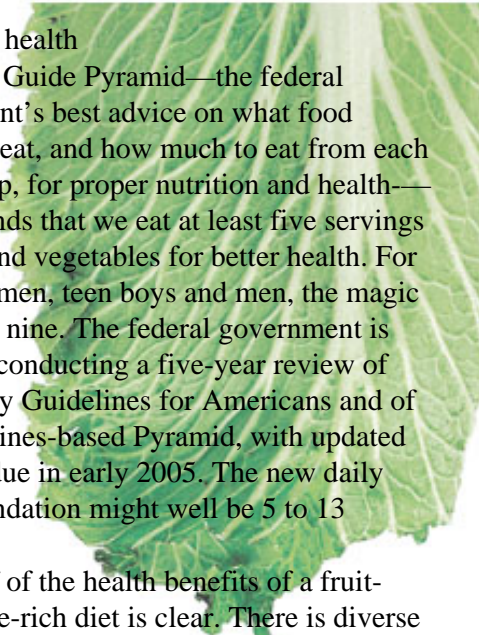
- **Partnerships can make it easy.** Admittedly, incorporating more fruits and vegetables, especially fresh ones, brings with it its own set of special challenges. But customers perceive fresh as an added value, and that builds loyalty and promotes repeat business. You can make your life easier by partnering with suppliers to procure convenient, recipe-ready items that fit your concept and are a good value. Seek their input on selection, handling, storage, and nutrition information, tips, and training that will maximize the shelf life and value of your perishables.

Fruits and vegetables are an easy way to expand your healthy menu offerings, and to satisfy your customers’ increasing expectations for freshness and flavor—all the while improving your margin, and increasing check average and repeat sales. So harness the power of the rainbow to boost your bottom line—and make Mom happy, too.

**For better health**

The Food Guide Pyramid—the federal government’s best advice on what food groups to eat, and how much to eat from each food group, for proper nutrition and health—recommends that we eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables for better health. For active women, teen boys and men, the magic number is nine. The federal government is currently conducting a five-year review of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and of the guidelines-based Pyramid, with updated versions due in early 2005. The new daily recommendation might well be 5 to 13 servings.

The proof of the health benefits of a fruit- and veggie-rich diet is clear. There is diverse and convincing research evidence that eating a diet rich in fruits and vegetables reduces the risk of cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. Replacing low nutrient, high-calorie foods with fruits and vegetables is a key part of fighting the obesity epidemic. Eating a colorful variety of fruits and vegetables every day provides the most health-promoting power that Mother Nature has to offer. Each fruit and vegetable has a unique assortment of disease-fighting properties supplied by their phytochemicals, vitamins, minerals and fiber.



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