

FAST GOOD FOOD & FAMILY

By Henk Hoogenkamp

PART 1

Lifestyle food marketing is segment-specific but can broadly be defined by coupling widely available, affordable, and tasty foods throughout life to enhance nutrition for general wellbeing, as well as to promote optimal health. In this emerging arena, the boundaries between grocery and food service continue to blur.

The Super-Size Generation

There is often confusion about the term "portion size." Consumers, food manufacturers, restaurants, and regulatory agencies interpret portion size in totally different ways. Serving sizes used for dietary guidelines are the amounts for optimal nutrition, but the consumer is lured by catch-terms like "supersize" as a perception of value and an abundance of eating and indulging.

The core consumers of fast food chains are men ages 18 to 34. Instead of being driven by the extra-value super-size portions, even with lasting dietary changes happening slowly, an increasing number of customers are now concerned about the purity, quality, taste, and health impact. Although more consumers are now aware about the negative health messaging arising from certain fat and sugar-loaded foods, enjoyment and indulgence still have a far greater influence on consumption choice than health does.

People in developed countries typically do not give a complete report on calorie consumption. The body weight in most developed countries has been steadily increasing to alarming levels, with a growing discrepancy between calorie reference data and the misreporting of actual calorie consumption.

In the US, serving sizes are typically understated and do not reflect portions that people usually eat – meaning they are bigger than serving sizes stated on food labels and nutrition facts. Making the calorie count bigger and bolder on the food label is the right thing to do for the Food and Drug Agency (FDA), which hopefully resonates with purchasing decisions of consumers.

It is a simple fact that people are still inclined to consume more food or drinks from larger size portions or packages. Reducing the availability

about the appropriate amount of food. Let's face it - most people eat until their stomach is full, and often a bit more than full. Overconsumption can lead to significant health ramifications, and portion-distortion plays a major role in the rampant obesity problems. Satiation is a subjective definition, which greatly differs from person to person.

The 2010 US dietary guidelines confronted obesity head-on for the first time. These guidelines put most of the food industry under greater pressure to formulate healthier foods in the hope of encouraging people to trim



of larger portion sizes and restricting pricing practices that enable larger package sizes to cost less in relative terms, is a suitable intervention to reduce calorie intake.

The discrepancy between nutritional sound portion sizes and what people actually eat contributes to the uncertainty

waistlines and get physically active in order to reduce the risk of developing a diet-related chronic disease. For the food industry, the message to eat less is potentially problematic. The food industry is not likely to address this topic anytime soon, considering that all marketing plans are based on selling more, not less. Healthy eating

should be more than a short-term resolution because it is about lifestyle and not just a gimmick to cut calories and lose weight.

Animal Fat Phobia

Ever since the early 1970s, the establishment of the dietetic world of self-proclaimed “experts” has demonized saturated fat as the number one evil causing strokes, heart disease and obesity.

For decades, animal saturated fat has been the most vilified nutrient in the diet of affluent societies. Now it seems that dietary animal fat may not be the nutritional bogeyman that it has been portrayed by the unrelenting wave of media coverage. Butter is back in fashion, and so are the saturated fats. To reverse the huge declines in margarine sales, Unilever decided in 2015 to reintroduce butter in some of their premium “heart healthy” margarine formulas. It will be a tough act for Unilever marketing to reverse their story after many years of demonizing saturated fat as heart-killer number one. The company might also decide that time has come to exit the margarine business altogether. Go figure!

The meta-analysis evaluating 72 different scientific studies published in the Journal Annals of Internal Medicine (March 2014), found no evidence to support the claims that saturated fat increases the risk of heart disease and other cardiac events. It brought back the longstanding belief that butter, meat, and dairy belong in a nutritionally-balanced healthy diet.

For at least 50 years, scientists have been presenting and preaching evidence linking saturated fats -like those found in animal products- with cardiovascular disease. Dating back to at least the early 1970's under the leadership of the global margarine giants, the consumer has

been bombarded with a never-ending barrage of propaganda about the ill effects of animal saturated fat. The same margarine industry “conveniently” forgot to inform the consumer that much of the non-saturated fat was in the form of transfat and that most of the polyunsaturated fats were, in fact, chemically extracted oils. As a result, new foods that were hyper-processed, containing a long list of additives to allow for a transformation of natural to the “new healthy”, filled the shopping carts. The arrival of these so-called “healthy” but ultra-processed margarine spreads and sugar-loaded foods in the 1970's are probably the most important factors contributing to the current obesity crisis crippling a large number of people around the world.

In the last decennia, reduced fat foods have become the norm for many people. This form of fat-phobia will not leave the mindset of consumers anytime soon, though it is increasingly clear that a rethinking of nutritional guidelines is in the making. For example, the closer milk is to zero percent fat, the more the omega-3 fatty acid benefits and the naturally-occurring Vitamins A and D are eliminated. Actually, whole milk may be a better satiety agent, reducing the intake of other forms of calorie consumption.

There is an urgent need for a careful reappraisal of the current nutritional guidelines. There are simply too many conflicting publications that confuse consumers. Based on the new scientific findings, it can be expected that the national committees on health guidelines will revisit the heart health issues as well as update their policies, and stop demonizing foods that contain saturated fats, such as those present in meat, milk and cheese.

The switch from a diet that included saturated fats in dairy, eggs and meat

have resulted in increased carbohydrate consumption, which –many researchers now believe- has contributed to the current crisis of obesity and diabetes T2. Over the last 50 years, scientists who were wedded to their theories about saturated fat and heart disease, tried to protect their hypothesis and “silence” or discredit opposing studies.

It was only in 1995 when the Americans became exceptionally alarmed by the fat content of food. At the beginning of the second decennia of the 21st century, their concerns were far more wide-ranging. Nutrition guidelines were overhauled again in 2015 to reduce sodium, limit starchy vegetables and ban transfat. Other dietary changes included the increase of wholegrain, more unsalted nuts, fruits and vegetables,



and limiting the number of calories in general.

Wholegrain has the potential to become a mainstay in the American diet. Federal dietary guidelines recommend a daily food intake, in which wholegrain is at the heart of preventing diseases like diabetes, weight control and heart-health.

Although most consumers know that whole grains are good food, many have little idea of why wholegrain cereals are good to start the day. The average person consumes far below the minimum recommended daily fiber. Consumers are also confused between the wordings “wholegrain” and “enriched grain”, the latter of which can be vitamin-enriched white flour. Wholegrain contains the entire grain kernel like (recombined) whole-wheat flour, whole rice flour, or oatmeal.

intake to less than 30 percent of energy calories, and saturated fat intake to less than 10 percent of energy calories. Limiting total fat consumption does not appear to improve overall health of the population. Actually, increasing fat intake to cover for about 35 percent of energy calorie requirements and reducing carbohydrates intake may lower risk of death.

One would expect that a high fat intake would increase the so-called

As a side note: in the developing poor countries where under-nutrition is prevalent, the general population is much better at restricting rice and other sources of carbohydrates, as well as adding additional sources of fats like coconut oil, dairy and other protein contributors such as provided by eggs, meat and plants.

People who eat high levels of carbohydrates –particularly refined sugars such as those found in fizzy drinks and ultra-processed snacks- face a higher risk of early death. Low-fat diets put populations at increased risk for cardiovascular disease. Loosening the restrictions on total fat and saturated fat and imposing limits on carbohydrates to moderate levels is the best bet for sustained health.

The right “sweet spot” would be around 35 percent of energy calories coming from fat and an average of 50 percent of energy calories from carbohydrates –of which only 5 percent should be plain sugar. A high carbohydrate diet –greater than 60 percent of energy calories- is associated with higher risk of mortality. Higher intake of fats, including saturated fats, is associated with lower risk of mortality. However, diet has little impact on heart death risk, suggesting it has a greater impact on other killers like cancer, dementia, respiratory disease and diabetes type 2.

The new dietary guidelines are in stark contrast with the avalanche of low-fat recommendations that besieged the world in the mid-1990s. The study published in *The Lancet*, August 29, 2017, has set off a wave of media coverage and opinions - both pros and cons. This study can be seen as a complete U-turn and might signal the beginning of the demonization of fat. (Associations of fats and carbohydrate intake with cardiovascular disease and mortality in 18 countries from



Breaking News: The Return of Animal Fat

Another breaking-news food story monopolized the airwaves suggesting that billions of people might have been barking up the wrong tree all these years regarding limiting dietary fat intake.

At the 2017 congress of European Society of Cardiology in Barcelona, a study showed that people aged 35 to 70 from 18 low, middle, and high income countries with a high fat dietary pattern appears to be associated with a lower risk of premature deaths by any cause, while a high carbohydrate diet is associated with a worse long-term outcome.

The study findings are a departure from the recommendation to limit total fat

“bad” cholesterol or low-density lipoprotein (LDL), which is known to clog arteries. The study showed that an increase in LDL cholesterol does happen with a high fat intake, but this is likely neutralized with an increase in high-density lipoprotein (HDL), also known as the “good” cholesterol. Subsequently, the net effect is a decrease in the total cholesterol/HDL ratio, which is favorable.

For decades, dietary guidelines have focused on reducing total fat and saturated fatty acid intake in particular. The new study data suggest otherwise and has given a unique opportunity to see the impact of diet on total mortality (death) and cardiovascular disease in diverse settings, some wherein over-nutrition is common and others where under-nutrition is of greater concern.

five continents: a prospective cohort study -The Lancet/European Society of Cardiology Congress, Barcelona Spain).

Fast Food Disruptions

Senior management of franchised fast food companies like to portray the image that change is part of their business culture to keep up with customer expectations and demands. Burgers, fries, shakes, sandwiches, and pizzas are still, however, synonymous with their core business. Before the recent world recession that started in mid-2008, a company like McDonald's predominantly catered to the so-called 'heavy users' of male customers who ate full-meal selections several times a week, as well as heavy toy promotions to get children through the doors. For the US, the demographic landscape has changed considerably for young adult consumers. To catch up with the rapidly changing demographic conditions, fast food companies, such as McDonald's and Domino's Pizza, are quickly adapting to the rise of digital ordering and delivery.

At a time when healthy eating is on the minds of many, most top performing fast food restaurants are not very engaged in the health & wellness space. Increasingly, publicly traded quick-serve restaurants leverage the latest digital technology to allow consumers to order from a variety of sources like Google Home. As a matter of fact, at least 50 percent or more sales for pizza restaurants like Pizza Hut, Papa John's and Domino's are coming from digital orders.

McDonald's is no longer the superstar of the fast food world dominating the industry and crowding out competitors. McDonald's has become less relevant for the millennial generation. Despite the rollout of an all-day breakfast menu, there is an urgent need not



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to become complacent. To do that, McDonald's is eying to aggressively clean up the ingredient deck of their menu, as well as market coffee and pastries, while also offering mobile order-and-pay delivery services. The latter is a bold move but worth a try, considering that 75 percent of the US population lives within 5 kilometers range of a McDonald's restaurant.

A well-designed mobile-ordering system can help manage waiting times at the counter and increase sales productivity. Especially for the "on-the-go" diners, digital ordering from mobile phones and delivery is an appealing advantage. As a matter of fact, digital food-ordering strategy is developing quickly and already starting to divide the restaurant industry into winners and losers.

Going forward, in the US nearly 50 percent of dinners purchased from a food service restaurant are consumed at home. Many in-home meals are a blend of dishes people prepare and ready-to-eat foods purchased via a

digital ordering system as a primary delivery tool.

McDelivery

McDonald's top delivery restaurants generate as much as 40 percent of their sales from delivery. In the US, the customers in select markets can now order from McDonald's menu for delivery to their home or office through the UberEATS app. McDonald's has expanded its food delivery services to 13 countries (September 2017), and the move is the largest expansion ever for the fast food giant. McDelivery is here to stay, and especially the large mega-cities are rolling out their welcoming carpet.

In China -for example- delivery services account for 10 percent of McDonald's total sales. McDonald's is clearly on a mission to position to become the global leader in the office and home ready-to-eat food delivery.

After years of ineffective leadership and marketing, as well as declining sales, McDonald's finally took the initiative

in 2017 to make bold changes in the menu-board line-up. In the US and Canada, McDonald's is clearly lagging rivals that largely emphasize freshness and taste. It is safe to predict that McDonald's will make some permanent changes to its core menu and start to rollout fresh (never-frozen) burgers and serve chicken foods without artificial preservations. They are also committed to cage-free eggs by 2025 and to only serve chicken made from chicken not treated with antibiotics important to human medicine.

In 2018, McDonald's US restaurants will transition to using fresh versus frozen beef patties -quarter pounders- for universal rollout. Their core consumers have spoken and they voted with a resounding yes to favor the never-frozen beef patties. It is obvious that a conversion from frozen to fresh beef burgers will almost certainly affect in-store operations and increase labor costs. These negative yielding variables need to be absorbed somewhere else and the deployment of mobile order and pay will most likely be of great help to offset the additional costs and improve restaurant efficiency.

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