Adults ages 55 to 64 are now the top spenders at restaurants, according to the National Restaurant Association’s 2008 Restaurant Industry Forecast. Visits by those ages 65 and up increased by nine per year, while visits by those ages 50 to 64 were up by four. With the now retiring baby boomers possessing $2 trillion in spending power, they are, perhaps, some of the most important customers to lure into your restaurants. However, in order to reap the benefits of more baby boomer customers, restaurants must cater more to their needs, which are undoubtedly changing.

It’s no surprise that as people grow older, their nutrition needs change. Chronic health conditions such as obesity, cardiovascular disease, hypertension and strokes, type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis often appear as people age. Along with this growing list, there is also metabolic syndrome, which clusters together risks such as high blood sugar, blood pressure and triglycerides with other issues that can eventually lead to more serious conditions such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease. This may seem like dismal news, but the good news—especially for those working in the food industry—is that a healthy diet can slow the development and, in some cases, prevent the onset of these diseases. For example, as people age their metabolic needs slow down and calorie needs decrease, so plates need to change in size and content. With the baby boomer generation spending so much money and calories in restaurants, it is imperative that chefs are aware of their nutrition needs and make a conscious effort to meet them.

Back to the basics

Chefs can help customers maintain lower blood pressure and reduce the risk of metabolic syndrome in a variety of ways. Food providers can begin by reducing the amount of salt used in meal preparation and by serving foods that emphasize vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains and no fat or low-fat dairy.

✓ Lower overall salt (sodium) intake
✓ Increase vegetable, fruit, legume, whole grain and reduced fat dairy consumption
✓ Reduce total energy intake (i.e. portion control and lower energy density)
✓ Maintain adequate protein intake

Balancing acts

Balance on the plate is key for any diet, especially baby boomers. In In Defense of Food (Penguin Group, 2009), Michael Pollan writes, “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.” This idea pretty much sums up the concept behind healthy eating for any generation, from the baby boomers to the generation Y. If two baby boomers walked into your restaurant, what would you serve them? This may sound like a riddle but there is a simple answer:

• A small portion of fish, meat, egg, cheese or legume
• Several vegetables
• A small serving of fruit
• A whole grain
• A tiny treat

Three steps to a heart-healthy dish

Substitute saturated and trans fats (the “bad” fats) for unsaturated and monounsaturated “good” fats. You can do this by making minor adjustments, such as using plant oils instead of butter.

Use foods high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as flaxseed and oily fish, including mackerel, salmon, trout, sardines, herring and tuna. Some foods that are fortified with omega-3’s include butter spreads, orange juice and yogurts.

Follow the basic principles of the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet, which stresses abundant use of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, fiber and reduced fat dairy items, while reducing the sodium and fat content.

Vital vitamins and minerals

• Vitamin D needs increase by 50 percent for the 51 to 70 age bracket. Though vitamin D mainly comes from exposure to sunlight, dietary sources are also important, as vitamin D helps absorb calcium.
• Calcium is an important component in maintaining good bone health. After age 50, more calcium is needed to help counter the harmful effects of accelerated bone loss, which can lead to osteoporosis, especially in women.
• Iron plays a vital role in general health. Lack of iron can result in
low amounts of energy and lower resistance to infection. Caffeine can make absorption of iron less efficient. Consider offering tea and coffee at staggered times throughout the day, and less often during meals.

- Vitamin C can help the body absorb iron. Fruit, especially citrus fruit, green vegetables, peppers, tomatoes and potatoes are all good sources of vitamin C.
- Folate (folic acid) is important for good health and can help combat nutrient deficiency.
- Vitamin B12 is important in the baby boomers’ diets since about 10 to 30 percent of older people may have decreased absorption of food-bound vitamin B12 due to reduced acid production in the stomach.

VITAL NUTRIENTS IN MYPYRAMID FOOD GROUPS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nutrient</th>
<th>Grains</th>
<th>Vegetables</th>
<th>Fruits</th>
<th>Oils</th>
<th>Milk</th>
<th>Meat and beans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calcium</td>
<td>Calcium-fortified foods</td>
<td>Broccoli, green beans, greens, spinach</td>
<td>Calcium-fortified orange</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Cheese, milk, yogurt</td>
<td>Almonds, canned salmon, sardines, shrimp, tofu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiber</td>
<td>Barley, brown rice, bulgur, oatmeal, whole grains</td>
<td>Artichokes, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, carrots, corn</td>
<td>Apples, banana, berries, dates, figs, oranges, papayas, pears, prunes</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Beans, nuts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folate (folic acid)</td>
<td>Fortified breakfast cereals, wheat germ, whole wheat products</td>
<td>Asparagus, leafy green vegetables</td>
<td>Melons, oranges, strawberries,</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Cottage cheese, yogurt</td>
<td>Beans, eggs, liver, sunflower seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>Wheat germ, oatmeal, whole grains</td>
<td>Broccoli, green beans, peas, potatoes, spinach</td>
<td>Dried apricots, peaches, prune juice</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Beans, beef, organ meats, seafood, tofu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B6</td>
<td>Fortified breakfast cereals, wheat germ, whole-wheat products</td>
<td>Cauliflower, potatoes, spinach</td>
<td>Avocados, bananas, cantaloupe, dates, watermelon</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Cottage cheese milk, yogurt</td>
<td>Beans, fish, meat, nuts, poultry, seeds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin B12</td>
<td>Fortified breakfast cereals</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Milk, soy milk, yogurt</td>
<td>Clams, lobster, organ meats, oysters, shrimp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin C</td>
<td>Fortified breakfast cereals</td>
<td>Cauliflower, green vegetables, potatoes, tomatoes</td>
<td>Citrus fruits, pineapple, strawberries</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin D</td>
<td>Fortified breakfast cereals</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Margarine</td>
<td>Milk, soy milk</td>
<td>Canned tuna, eel, herring, salmon, sardines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamin E</td>
<td>Whole grains</td>
<td>Asparagus, cabbage, sweet potatoes, tomatoes</td>
<td>Apples, avocados, mango</td>
<td>Margarines, plant oils</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Nuts, peanut butter, seeds, shrimp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zinc</td>
<td>Whole-grains</td>
<td>Asparagus, peas, spinach</td>
<td>Avocados, dried fruit</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Milk, yogurt, cheese</td>
<td>Beans, beef, eggs, nuts, poultry, shellfish</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Contemporary Nutrition, Seventh Edition (McGraw-Hill, 2009) by Anne Smith and Gordon Wardlaw
Less is more

Evidence of an unfolding new social norm is already surfacing. One in which smaller portion sizes are becoming more accepted and requested. The quality and taste of food continues to be important to customers. However, the health considerations that warrant reductions in overall calories on the plate or calories per bite is gaining in popularity with guests and chefs. For example, the food industry is already manufacturing successful items such as mini muffins, 100-calorie snack packs and 90-calorie soda cans, and some restaurants are serving small dessert bites and half-portion deals.

Previous “Culinary Nutrition News” articles have suggested offering an early bird special all day long, which would be of interest to baby boomers. However, The Culinary Institute of America’s book *Techniques of Healthy Cooking* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2008) shares a few other ideas, such as offering two versions of the same dish with differing portion sizes at different prices. Essentially, you are allowing the customer to vote on which portion they prefer. Then, after a few months, you can drop the less popular version from the menu. Another strategy is in the presentation of the dish. Since smaller meat portions are especially important for the needs of baby boomers, try stuffing a meat, fish or poultry item with vegetables and/or grains. This strategy not only adds fiber—another essential component to the baby boomer diet—while decreasing the meat portion, but it also improves the visual appeal of the dish. Special knife cuts can also give the illusion of less is more. Cutting a salmon fillet on the bias before cooking, thinly slicing and fanning cooked meat or poultry, or pounding or butterflying a piece of meat, fish or poultry all give the appearance of a larger portion.

Dr. Margaret D. Condrasky, R.D., C.C.E., is an associate professor of Food Science and Human Nutrition at Clemson University. She leads the CU CHEFS® program for improving culinary nutrition skills.

Marie Hegler is a graduate of the Food Science and Human Nutrition department with a culinary science emphasis at Clemson University, which operates the CU CHEFS® program for improving culinary nutrition skills.

About the American Culinary Federation and the Chef & Child Foundation

The American Culinary Federation, Inc., established in 1929, is the premier professional organization for culinarians in North America. With more than 22,000 members spanning 230 chapters nationwide, ACF is the culinary leader in offering educational resources, training, apprenticeship and accreditation. In addition, ACF operates the most comprehensive certification program for chefs in the United States. ACF is home to ACF Culinary Team USA, the official representative for the United States in major international culinary competitions, and to the Chef & Child Foundation, founded in 1989 to promote proper nutrition in children and to combat childhood obesity. For more information, visit www.acfchefs.org.

About Clemson University

CU CHEFS® (Clemson University’s Cooking and Healthy Eating Food Specialists) instructional program, led by Dr. Marge Condrasky, Associate Professor in Food Science and Human Nutrition, is a registered trademark of Clemson University designed to promote changes in menu planning, food purchasing, food preparation and food consumption behaviors with a goal of fostering good health through healthy nutrition. ‘Culinary nutrition’ is the application of nutrition principles combined with food science knowledge displayed through a mastery of culinary skills. The results are healthy eating behaviors grounded in culinary confidence and nutrition alertness. CU CHEFS® promotes an awareness of the latest trends in foods and nutrition through the demonstration of proficient culinary skills to produce flavorful, health-inspired menus for schools, churches, restaurants. Clemson University, located in Clemson, S.C., is ranked 22 among the nation's top public institutions. Since 2001, Clemson has doubled external research funding, raised the academic profile of the student body, increased retention and graduation rates, launched high-profile economic development and has earned national accolades, including being named *TIME* magazine’s Public College of the Year.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) diet has been proven to lower blood pressure in studies sponsored by the National Institutes of Health, and is based on an eating plan that increases fruit, vegetable and fiber consumption while decreasing fat and sodium intake.

Visit: http://dashdiet.org