

Dieting Trends - UK - November 2013

Report Price: £1750.00 | \$2834.04 | €2223.04

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"Clear like-for-like comparisons between diet products and their non-diet alternatives should allow brands to show consumers that there are genuine and tangible differences in the calorie/fat/sugar content, and highlight where these owe to healthier recipes rather than simply smaller portions."

– Emma Clifford, Senior Food Analyst

This report looks at the following areas:

- Can diet brands use clearer comparisons to standard alternatives to win consumers' trust?
- Can natural sweeteners help brands to overcome concerns over the ingredients in diet food?
- What impact is the new consistent nutrition labelling scheme for food and drink products likely to have on the diet food market?
- How can diet food brands heighten their appeal among the younger and older generation?

The UK's growing obesity problem is having a dramatic impact on the health of the nation, translating into a weighty financial burden for the NHS. This has made the issue a key focus within both political and media spheres, and dieting has become ingrained into many Briton's lifestyles. The majority of adults (65% of women and 44% of men) have tried to lose weight in the 12 months to September 2013.

While the diet food market should be reaping the rewards from Britons' desire to slim down, sales have only increased by a marginally between 2008 and 2013..

Consumers have many weapons in their armoury when it comes to managing their weight, and they prefer to exercise more, reduce portion sizes and cut back on certain types of food (eg those with a high content of fat/sugar/carbs) than to eat more diet products. This owes to a number of negative perceptions which plague the market. These include concerns over the ingredients/sweeteners that go into diet products, distrust that diet brands provide nutritious food, doubts over significant differences in calories between these and the standard alternatives and the perception of small serving sizes.

As such there is a strong demand for greater transparency, and six in 10 adults would like to see clearer nutritional information that shows the differences between diet foods and their non-diet equivalents. This is something the government's uniform front-of-pack labelling system could help to address.

Amid concerns about artificial ingredients, there is significant interest in seeing more products using natural sweeteners (eg stevia) to replace sugar, indicating opportunities for brands.

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