



Lightening Up The Dessert Course

Operators, chefs find ways to make desserts healthier while retaining great flavor.

Approximately two-thirds of Americans are classified as being either overweight or obese according to government health figures, so it's not surprising that more people with an eye toward consuming less sugar and fats are taking a closer look at the nutritional composition of the food they order in restaurants. Nevertheless, most continue to want to enjoy some level of dietary indulgence where desserts are concerned.

Arlene Spiegel of New York-based restaurant consulting company Arlene Spiegel & Assoc. acknowledges the need for restaurateurs to cater to this growing population with lighter healthful desserts. "Many 'health conscious' diners do not want to blow their calories on a fattening dessert, but they do want that sweet ending," she says.

The foodservice industry has not ignored what consumers are saying, either. The National Restaurant Association's What's Hot 2016 Culinary Forecast found that 65 percent of the nearly 1,800 culinary professionals polled believe that nutrition is shaping up to be a hot trend this year. As a

result, more chefs are finding ways to lighten some of the dessert selections on their menus without compromising taste.

"Restaurants are increasingly working with fruit in all forms on their dessert menus," Spiegel says. "One of my clients offers a dessert of pineapple carpaccio topped with blood orange sorbet. This item has become the most popular dessert on the menu. Housemade sorbets, crustless fruit tarts and frappés are also popular choices."

More and more, consumers are looking for dessert items that offer healthful dietary solutions as well as a flavorful, indulgent experience, experts maintain. "People in general are just smarter when it comes to eating," Ferron says. "They're looking for lighter options. They're taking more of an interest in what they're putting in their bodies."

Consequently, Spiegel says, "It's smart for restaurants to offer lighter desserts as it adds to the enjoyment of the total meal experience and doesn't leave any of the guests out."

"Of course," she adds, "it also adds to the ticket average."