

## ☀ Diet Foods 20<sup>th</sup> C

Throughout the 1960's, into approximately the mid-1980's, a segment of a typical grocery store was dedicated to "diet foods", usually stocked in the least-travelled and inaccessible aisle sections. The packaging was dull and muted (dusty-pinks, matted finish) with bland label copy, if any, and the category was exclusively dedicated to weight loss. The selection was narrow; the most commonly available items were melba toast, saccharin sachets ([banned in Canada by Health Canada since the 1970's](#)), sugar-free pudding and gelatin dessert mixes, and, diet soft drinks such as Coca-Cola®'s [TaB](#), launched in 1963.

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Fueled by online portals and home delivery, several consumer segments of the Western population adhere to a defined dietary regime for as many reasons as there are marketplace choices.

### ☀ *Branded Weight-loss*

The first type of diet food, and currently the most prevalent, the US market for weight-loss food exceeds US\$65 Billion and comprises [~75 million consumers](#), 80% of whom continually switch regimes.

Food which is branded and marketed as the cornerstone of a weight-loss regime builds consumer loyalty (some would argue or add – illusion) in two ways: it creates an element of exclusivity, in which the promise of weight loss is strengthened through the selection and consumption of the specially-formulated food. Secondly, it provides the consumer with a convenient means to stick to the plan's rules.

[Weight Watcher's®](#) has been long-favoured by many healthcare and nutrition professionals, due to its sound nutritional basis, track record, and inclusion of widely available food. Branded [bakery items and frozen desserts](#) state the number of Weight Watcher® points (1 point ≈ 40 calories) per serving, on the label, to support and inform point-of-purchase decisions.

[SlimFast®](#) was launched in 1977 as a complete and effective weight-loss dietary regime. SlimFast® remains the global market leader in branded weight-loss foods, with up to 45% market share in some product groups, including ready-to-drink shakes, powders, snack and meal on-the-go bars, and juices.

## ☀ *Diabetic*

Food marketed as "suitable for diabetics" has often failed to pass regulatory scrutiny, and, has never been embraced by health and nutrition professionals for two main reasons: no one dietary pattern is suitable for all diabetics, and, the most effective and cost-efficient option is to make informed food choices from the general food supply. Up to the late 1990's, some foods claimed the [official diabetic exchange symbols](#) on label.

## ☀ *Allergen-free*

For some people, life-or-death is at stake if a food contains a non-labelled priority food allergen. Allergen labelling is law in most countries, [yet the inclusion list varies from one jurisdiction to another](#), due to localized and documented adverse reactions.

## ☀ *Driven by ethics and values*

The source of food, including how it is farmed, or if animal-based, raised, results in choices such as organic ([global market value exceeds \\$US 60B](#)) or vegetarian ([US: 12% of consumers < age 49; 5% of consumers > age 50](#)). The loosely-defined attribute of [sustainable](#) attracts consumers to plant-based, compostable food produced through eco-friendly processes and wrapped in recyclable packaging.

## ☀ *Paleo*

The new kid on the block. "Paleo" is making its way on to more and more food labels. Described by Wikipedia as a ["modern fad diet"](#), Paleo excludes highly processed food; it recognizes only those foods consumed by Paleolithic humans, who inhabited the earth 2.6 million to 10,000 years ago. Paleo includes meat; it excludes refined sugar, refined grains, dairy, salt, alcohol and coffee, to name a few.

## ☀ *Regulatory weigh in*

All copy on a food label must be factual and truthful. Accordingly, it need withstand verification. While some label claims, such as Organic, are governed by legislation, others, such as Paleo, have not yet evolved to yield to, nor require, similar scrutiny. **FF**