

# U.S. Healthy Eating Trends Part 5: Nielsen Healthy Eating Index Debuts

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## Part 5 of 5 on Healthy Eating Trends and Myths

For years, retailers, manufacturers and marketers have been clamoring for a single benchmark that would facilitate comparisons of healthy eating patterns by key regions and time periods. Although The Nielsen Company has frequently reported on healthy eating trends, most insights have been focused on individual characteristics or product claims like “organic” or “fat free.” The missing piece of the puzzle has been a single measure that includes a combination of several key healthy eating indicators across multiple categories.

By combining the sales of 13 healthy eating components relative to total (UPC-coded food sales), the Nielsen Healthy Eating Index can track healthy eating choices over time and monitor the impact of industry health and wellness initiatives. The index is calculated by adding supermarket sales for products with health claims on their label, like “natural” or “reduced calorie.” Sales are also added from some inherently healthy categories like fresh produce.

Adjustments are made to give more weight to key healthy eating indicators with relatively low sales like omega and antioxidant claims. Other health claims with strong sales like “reduced fat” and “natural” are given less weight to avoid having fluctuations in commodity prices adding volatility to the Index.

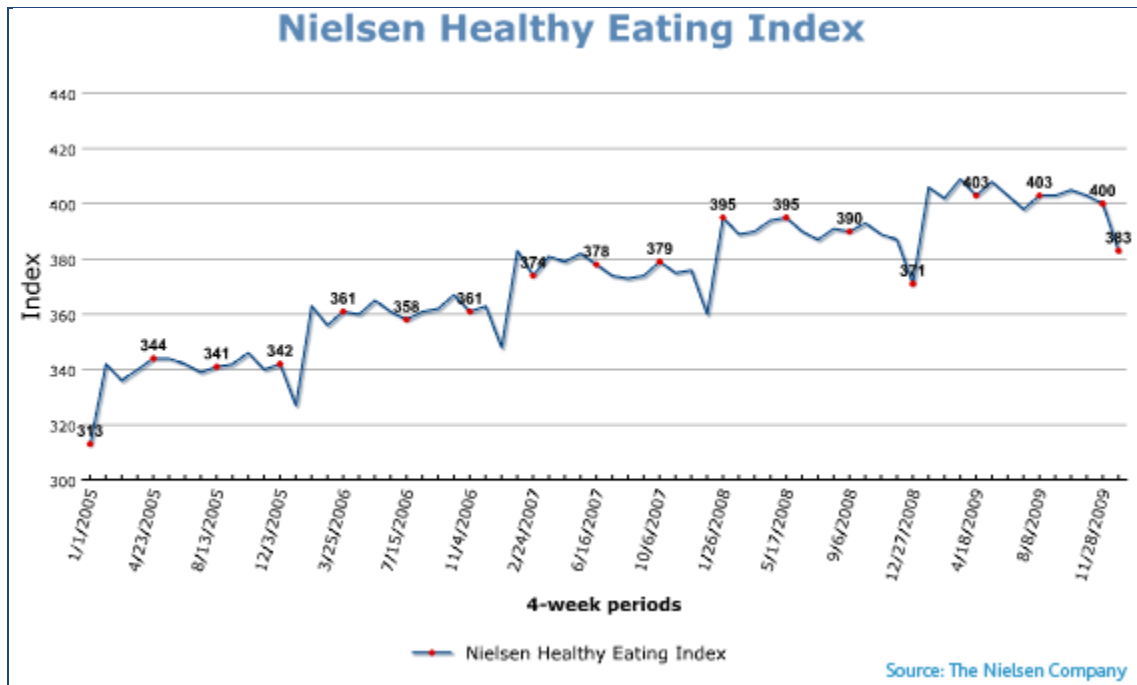
Some products with multiple health claims like bread labeled “organic,” “whole wheat” and “high fiber” are counted in each group. The total dollar volume of these products is then divided by total UPC-coded food sales to make sure the Index is not disrupted by severe changes in total food volume or pricing.

For example, the data below shows that dollar sales of foods making an “antioxidant” claim represent 4.1% of the Index based on dollars and a weighting factor of 200%. Products with “Fat” claims make the largest contribution to the Index – even when excluding milk sales and factoring by 50%.

Category or Claim	Contribution To Nielsen Healthy Eating Index
Fat Content Claim (Excludes Milk)	19.5%
Category: UPC-Coded Fresh Produce	14.9%
"Natural" Claim	11.3%
"Reduced Calorie" Claim	11.2%
"Whole Grain" Claim	9.7%
Sodium Content (Excludes Sodas)	7.4%
"Organic" Claim	4.8%
"Fiber" Claim	4.4%
"Antioxidant" Claim	4.1%
Category: Canned Vegetables	3.9%
Category: Frozen Vegetables	3.9%
"Omega" Claim	3.8%
Category: Dried Vegetables/Grains	1.1%

Source: The Nielsen Company, Calendar year 2009

According to the Nielsen Healthy Eating Index, the U.S. is making progress on the healthy eating front, scoring 402 in 2009 vs. 389 in 2008. The chart below shows the seasonal nature of healthy eating habits across the U.S. You'll notice that every year, consumers make unhealthy food choices over the holidays. Then in January, diets get back on track and healthy eating is a priority again. Another observation is that January seems to set the tone for healthy eating throughout the year. The month of September (back-to-school) is another time when Americans tend to make healthier food decisions.



The Nielsen Healthy Eating Index is a subjective approach to measuring healthy eating trends including better-for-you alternatives. It will allow both retailers and manufacturers to measure their efforts to promote healthier food choices. For more information on food and nutrition, visit the American Dietetic Association at [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org). For information on USDA's dietary guidance and recommendations, visit [www.mypyramid.gov](http://www.mypyramid.gov).

Over time we expect to fine-tune the Nielsen Index based on the latest nutritional research available. Stay tuned to Nielsen Wire for more on this new metric. In the coming weeks, we will look at January healthy eating trends setting the pace for 2010. We'll also compare major U.S. markets using the Nielsen Healthy Eating Index.

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