

# New Curion Research Reveals the GLP-1 Menu Paradox: Consumers Want Smaller, Protein-Forward Options but Reject Labeling

*Survey of More Than 8,500 Consumers Exposes the Gap Between Demand and Identity in Restaurant Dining — And What Operators Must Do About It*

DEERFIELD , IL, UNITED STATES, March 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- [Curion](#), one of the largest product and consumer insights companies in the United States, is releasing new findings revealing a critical tension reshaping how restaurants must approach menu design in the era of [GLP-1](#) medications: consumers want the options these drugs require, but they don't want to be seen ordering them.



In a study of more than 8,500 U.S. consumers, Curion found that 58.5% say they would likely

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*Rachel Buss, vice president of strategic insights at Curion Insights*

order smaller, protein-forward versions of popular menu items if offered at restaurants. At the same time, 37.4% say they have no interest in anything labeled “GLP-1-friendly.” The result is what Curion calls the GLP-1 Menu Paradox: a large and growing appetite for change, paired with a firm rejection of the identity that change implies.

“Restaurants are facing the same challenge they’ve always faced with weight-related consumer trends; how do you serve the need without making the guest feel labeled?” said Rachel Buss, vice president of strategic insights at Curion Insights. “What GLP-1 has done is bring those needs into sharper focus. The same menu architecture that works for a GLP-1 user also works for the macro-tracker, the runner, the fitness-focused consumer. This is

not a niche — it's the mainstream, and restaurants that treat it as one will miss the opportunity

entirely.”

### Key Research Findings

- 58.5% of consumers would likely order smaller, protein-forward versions of popular menu items if offered
- 37.4% of consumers actively reject menus or items labeled “GLP-1-friendly”
- Top consumer preferences for GLP-1-accommodating restaurant experiences: flexible portion sizes (39.2%), protein-first framing (28.0%), and smaller indulgent options (23.5%). Only 9.1% wanted explicit GLP-1 labeling.
- 24% of current GLP-1 users say they regularly order from the kids’ menu as a portion workaround — creating a measurable margin risk for operators who have not yet addressed the demand
- 56.9% of consumers who say they will never use GLP-1 medications are still interested in smaller, protein-forward menu options — confirming this is a mainstream behavioral shift, not a medical niche

### The Industry Is Responding — But Not Equally

Curion’s research reviewed how major restaurant chains are currently navigating this challenge. While brands including Chipotle, Shake Shack, Olive Garden, and Smoothie King have each introduced offerings designed to address smaller appetites and protein-forward demand, their approaches differ significantly — and so do the consumer signals each strategy sends.

Chipotle’s High Protein Menu leads with protein and fiber, mentioning GLP-1 only in fine print. Shake Shack’s “Good Fit” menu emphasizes broad wellness goals. Olive Garden’s Lighter Portions approach simultaneously addresses portion size and price accessibility. Smoothie King is among the few brands leading overtly with the GLP-1 designation, including in product names — a strategy the market is still evaluating.

“The brands getting this right are the ones treating GLP-1 as a design challenge, not a marketing category,” Buss noted. “Flexibility, protein prioritization, and portion optionality resonate across a wide range of consumers — not just those on medication. Operators who build for that broader audience will capture far more of the opportunity.”

### Three Menu Imperatives for Operators

Based on its research, Curion identifies three strategic imperatives for restaurant operators:

- Portion Architecture: Intentionally designed smaller builds with full flavor integrity — full, lighter, and mini versions of core items that feel like smart choices, not compromises
- Protein Replaces “Low-Calorie”: Protein communicates satiety and value — a language that resonates far more broadly than calorie counting or diet labeling
- Flexibility Without Complexity: Maximize customization across bases, proteins, portions, and add-ons without eroding quality or operational efficiency

“The winners of this movement will be the brands that successfully engineer satisfaction in

smaller formats and let guests choose for themselves,” said Buss. “This is appetite economics. It is changing not just what people eat, but how much they eat and how much they spend — at every point of sale.”

About Curion:

Curion specializes in delivering impactful insights to the world’s top CPG companies, helping them develop winning, repeatedly purchased products. Curion’s deep data-driven product insights, sensory expertise, and state-of-the-art consumer centers enable them to uncover responses to critical client objectives.

With over five decades of experience in the product testing industry, Curion is dedicated to guiding clients and connecting brands to consumers at every step.

As one of the largest product and consumer insights companies in the U.S., Curion has built a reputation for excellence and trust among the world’s leading consumer brands. Curion’s commitment to innovation and expertise, coupled with a passion for delivering actionable insights, makes Curion a valuable partner for companies looking to develop and launch successful products.

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