



LEO J. SHAPIRO & ASSOCIATES LLC

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## Bread is Hot

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Many new products that come on the market are designed to change how Americans eat. A driving force behind all these products is to control weight and to preserve health. Now, bread, long a target of abstinence, is making a return in a new form. It is competing with a cornucopia of snack foods, which have been targeted as a cause of obesity and ill health. Ironically, the snack food industry developed early in the last century as an evolution from bread. Instead of snacking on bread, consumers learned to snack on crackers, chips and various puffed products made from corn, wheat, potatoes, rice, and flavored with salt, cheese and spices.

The return to bread is being led by the conversion of fresh bread into chips and toasted products, and by the growth of fresh bakeries and sandwiches served on designer breads. Leaders in this are fast food outlets, such as Subway, which offers its sandwiches on a variety of fresh baked breads; restaurant/bakery chains, such as Panera, Vie de France and Corner Bakery, and supermarkets that are baking fresh bread on site. The bagel, which became popular after WWII, morphed into bagel chips in the 1980s and is now a popular snack food. Similarly, pita – a Mediterranean and Mideastern bread – has morphed into pita chips, and there are numerous versions of products derived from bread that are on the market, including fresh breads, zwieback and matzo.

The popularity of salads has given impetus to croutons. A study recently completed by Leo J. Shapiro & Associates found four in ten American households with croutons on hand in their kitchen and more than half (53%) purchasing croutons during the course of the year. While their main use is for salads, croutons are also used for soups and with other foods, and 11% of American adults acknowledge using them as a snack food.<sup>1</sup>

As the market for traditional snack foods moderates, bread is increasingly filling the gap. By providing bread bite-size and in forms that are not as perishable as fresh breads, Americans are increasingly able to eat bread on demand wherever they are. In its new forms, bread is now a tasty indulgence seen as less reprehensible than traditional snack foods.

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<sup>1</sup> June 2007 Leo J. Shapiro & Associates, Chicago, IL National study of 450 households interviewed by telephone.

Many of the fresh breads now being sold, some in bakery chains such as Harvest Breads, are being promoted as nutritious health products, often based on combinations of grain, fiber, and nutrients. The personality that bread is now establishing is returning it from its primary role as a sandwich wrap to its origin as the “staff of life.” The rich cultural contributions that have been made to the loaf of bread are resurfacing and gaining popularity. Some people are even making regular trips to the “bread store.”

The re-emergence of bread as a significant table item and snack may come to have more impact on how we eat than is now recognized. As bread moves from being a wrap for other foods it may come to displace more than just traditional snacks. Bread, it may turn out may be an unsuspected means to curbing not only obesity but the multiplicity of risks in processed foods that the consumer is now trying to control.

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