



**The most important meal of the day**

Once, the hotel breakfast was the one meal that wasn't firing on all cylinders – but not so anymore. Hotels have had to respond to breakfasters who were favouring a quick croissant and coffee down the street says Hilton's Martin Wormull. "Introducing a brand new breakfast offering has been a key initiative for us because it is so important to our guests," he adds, "and we conducted extensive research to find out exactly what guests want. By far the consensus was consistency and that's the premise the new Hilton breakfast is built on. We've introduced healthy options which are identified on the buffet."

Buffet reform is also on the menu when it comes to conferences. According to the UK Conference Market Survey 2003, the biggest single cause of delegate dissatisfaction is the food. Novotel London West is making a planned response to such findings and, says their food and beverage manager, Laurant Noury, it's not just a matter of food quality, it's appearance and style as well. Novotel has decided to introduce some flair with its Grandes Assiettes concept, which consists of a platter holding up to six individual courses.

"There are four standard Grandes Assiettes menus," explains Laurant, "with meat, fish, vegetarian and "healthy" to choose from but we're also encouraging customers to tailor make their own menu to fit in with the needs of each event." Flexibility and ease of service have already

made it a hit with customers and Rene Angoujard general manager of Novotel London is convinced that it will become one of the hotel's unique selling points.

**But what about room service?**

Sheraton's Katherine Gordon is aware of the special needs of business guests who work through the evening and don't have time for formal dinner. "We have had to increase our offer for in-room dining as more and more single travellers were visiting our hotels and with their busy schedules they demanded a quick and easy way to eat in their room," she says. Not all hotels can match the Las Vegas Caesar's Palace by offering three course Chinese meals as part of room service but most have moved away from routine sandwich offerings into Mediterranean cuisine and light Asian fusion styles, perfect for enjoying alone with a glass of wine and a TV break from the work schedule.

Depending on hotel type, returns from food and beverages can run up to 70 per cent of all profits. That's something hotels can't neglect. For business clients, hunting down a restaurant after a busy day's work can be pretty unappealing. Likewise, the hotel dining room can seem a very relaxing oasis to the tourist who has tramped around for hours to see the sights. It's up to hotels to run with that and provide guests with the food, the wine and the buzz that will make them stay in rather than go out to eat. Signs are, they're getting there.

# Are you a GI Joe?

The latest diet phenomenon to take the health conscious by storm is the Glycaemic Index, or GI diet. The GI system was developed back in 1981 by nutritionist Dr. David Jenkins and ranks foods based on the rate at which they raise blood sugar levels. Low GI foods slowly release sugar into the blood, giving you a steady supply of energy and making you feel full for longer. But high GI foods cause a rapid rise, followed by a quick fall, resulting in hunger and tiredness.

The scale runs from 0 to 100, with 100 being high, and foods are ranked according to whether they raise blood sugar levels a bit (55 or less), moderately (56 – 69) or dramatically (70+). For example, wholegrains, apples and tomato soup are ranked as low, muesli, boiled potatoes and pitta bread are moderate, and white bread, cornflakes and French fries are high.

Compared to diets such as the Atkins, many nutritionists support the GI approach and agree that, if followed properly, it could be beneficial for weight loss. Plus, it could improve levels of 'good' cholesterol and reduce the risk of heart disease. The only snag comes with some of the ratings – milk chocolate is rated as a low GI food, and shortbread as medium, yet they're both high in fat. So, like other approaches, it does boil down to making sensible choices.

If you're away on business and are following the GI diet, then it's worth informing hotels in advance as often they're happy to cater for special diets. It's also handy to keep a list of GI food ratings with you, so you can check what you're eating. Low GI foods should be included in each meal or snack, but remember to choose low-fat options, and if you're trying to lose weight, watch your portion sizes.

**Rachel Newcombe**