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Diners offer some tasty tips

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Across the country, diners are eating out more often, spending more, and drinking more than last year, according to an OpenTable.com survey of more than 3,000 customers (about 400 diners in each of eight cities). Although most respondents said they thought service was better or as good as in the past, tipping varied among the cities. Bostonians said they tipped more than 25 percent for excellent service compared to 24 percent in San Francisco and 25 percent in New York and Los Angeles. And Bostonians also reported tipping 15 percent even for below-average service, compared to 13 percent in Chicago and Los Angeles.

Not surprisingly, parking -- or the lack of it -- is cited as a reason not to dine out more in Boston. Bostonians also are more tolerant of children in restaurants than are customers in Chicago, Atlanta, and New York. Nearly everyone is annoyed about cellphone use in restaurants, with 88 percent of the Boston respondents complaining about it. Our city ties Philadelphia in the dubious category of not considering lower carbohydrate or fat content when ordering; Washington diners are the most health-conscious. When it's time for dessert, about half the Bostonians and Washingtonians order it; 60 percent of New Yorkers do. The survey, conducted by Genesis Research Associates, polled diners in Boston, New York, San Francisco, Washington, Chicago, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Los Angeles.