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TREND PREDICTIONS

INTRODUCTION

The food and beverage industry is continually evolving, shaped by changing consumer expectations, emerging technologies and regulatory environments. Staying ahead means understanding not just what's happening now, but what's coming next. With expertise in the food industry, market intelligence and consumer insights, ColinKurtis highlights six trends that will influence product development and marketing strategies in the coming year.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ColinKurtis Advertising has celebrated over 25 years of marketing success. From elevating brands' social and digital presence to helping them build a sustainable marketing strategy, our team of experts supports food, beverage and nutrition businesses in creating actionable plans and achievable goals that differentiate them from their competition. Staying in the loop on all things food ensures we produce relevant, engaging and profitable content for our clients.

SHAPING TOMORROW'S FOOD AND DRINK

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3. PLANT-POWERED PROGRESSION
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1

THE GLP-1 EFFECT

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The rise of GLP-1 medications is creating a shift in the health and wellness and food industries. J.P. Morgan forecasts that **by 2030, around 30 million U.S. adults will be using these medications,** making it a $105 billion market.[1]

According to McKinsey & Company, the wellness ecosystem that has emerged as a byproduct of the GLP-1 boom is driving momentum in the weight management category.[2] GLP-1 users are eating less, but focused on getting more nutrition out of fewer calories. **This shift is driving demand for:**

- **Protein-fortified foods to support muscle health and satiety**
- **Fiber-fortified foods to support gastrointestinal health, digestive comfort and satiety**
- **Nutrient-dense foods to ensure each calorie counts**

We're already seeing a shift in product launches. **Packaged foods, beverages and even subscription meals are increasingly targeting GLP-1 dietary needs,** while also appealing to non-GLP-1 consumers pursuing weight management. Companies are recognizing that these consumers eat less, but need to make each calorie count. Think nutrient-dense in smaller portions.

GLP-1 FOCUS AREAS:

- Nutrient-dense foods
- Protein
- Fiber
- Muscle health
- Gastrointestinal health
- Satiety
- Hydration

INGREDIENTS IN FOCUS:
Lean Protein
Fiber
Healthy Fats
Whole Grains
Nuts
Seeds

SUPPORT NEW NEEDS

While fiber, protein, vitamins and minerals are top of mind, it's important to address future needs. Satiety will continue to be a focus as appetite will still need to be controlled after weight loss. Another area to watch will be the **energy market.** As people achieve weight loss that they haven't been able to before, they become more active, requiring products to fuel their active lifestyles throughout the day.

Functional and Appealing

Formulating GLP-1 friendly foods goes beyond meeting nutritional needs. With users having less of an appetite but still needing to eat, focus also has to be on making these GLP-1 friendly foods **appealing in taste, texture and appearance.**

2

REFORMULATION: SPOTLIGHT ON LABELS

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Clean label and transparency remain powerful drivers in the food industry, but this trend is evolving. What began as a call for recognizable ingredients and minimal processing now reaches into the removal of specific ingredients, sourcing and regulatory compliance. For example, with the ban of specific synthetic dyes, manufacturers are looking for natural color alternatives that meet both visual appeal and clean label expectations, such as red beet, butterfly pea and spirulina. Consumers increasingly want the full story behind what they eat, and companies may find themselves **reformulating** to accommodate demand and changing regulations.

Health and Ingredient Transparency

Nearly half of U.S. consumers prioritize clean eating, led by those in their 30s, with 65% showing strong interest in clean, transparent food choices.[3] Transparency and clean label factors like **recognizable ingredients and minimal processing rank high in purchase decisions**, with shoppers favoring products made with real ingredients and **free from** artificial additives or pesticides.

While they value clean products, younger consumers are also becoming more open to innovative ingredients that align with their health goals.[3]

THE IMPACT OF REGULATION

The U.S. *Make America Healthy Again* (MAHA) initiative and a pending uniform definition for ultra-processed foods[4] are pushing the industry to consider reformulating products. Targeting ingredients like synthetic dyes and preservatives like BHA and BHT has sent manufacturers looking for clean label versions that are equally as effective and uncompromising in quality. State-level bans on certain food ingredients and even changing school lunch program requirements add further pressure to reformulate to comply with changing regulations.

Tariffs and Supply Chain Challenges

Tariff uncertainty adds another layer to reformulation. Rising costs for certain imported ingredients are pushing brands to rethink sourcing and adjust formulations to ensure affordability without sacrificing quality or transparency.

3

PLANT-POWERED PROGRESSION

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The plant-based sector is changing rapidly. While early plant-based products focused primarily on novelty, **today's innovations emphasize taste, affordability and nutrition** to appeal to a broader consumer base. Naturalness is the second most desired benefit after health when buying plant-based products.[5]

For plant-based products to gain wider appeal, improving taste, affordability and naturalness will be crucial.[3]

PLANT-BASED CHALLENGES

Challenges still exist regarding taste, texture, shorter, cleaner ingredient lists and overprocessing when it comes to plant-based foods. The proportion of consumers saying that artificiality is a barrier to purchase plant-based products rose between 2024 and 2025.[5] **Forward-looking plant-based brands are reformulating to appeal to a broader market and balance taste, clean label, nutrition and sustainability.**

Consumer feedback has driven plant-based food innovation, leading to improved taste perception and a trend towards diverse ingredients and plant-forward products.[6]

WHOLE PLANT INGREDIENTS

Today's consumer is highly interested in plant-based products made with whole plant ingredients.[5] They want more plants in their plant-based foods. Brands are formulating or reformulating with recognizable plant ingredients, adding more natural and fresh ingredients to prepared foods such as ready meals and using authentic and artisanal ingredients and sourcing.

FUNCTIONAL AND INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

Innovation in plant-based products is expanding beyond traditional plant protein sources. **Precision fermentation** is emerging as a powerful tool to produce ingredients like egg and whey alternatives with a smaller environmental footprint, using less land and water than conventional methods. While consumer awareness of fermentation is low, it aligns with clean label and sustainable innovation goals.

Similarly, **upcycling** continues to gain traction, creating new, valuable products while addressing **sustainability** concerns. These approaches not only enhance functionality but also help brands meet nutritional and clean label expectations.

4

YOUNGER GENERATIONS RIDE THE WELLNESS WAVE

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Good health and wellness increasingly encompass a more holistic view of health, with a strong emphasis on mental and emotional well-being. This is mostly influenced by Gen Z and millennials, whose behaviors, priorities and spending power are shaping the future of the wellness sector.

Nearly 30 percent of Gen Z and millennials in the U.S. report prioritizing wellness “a lot more” compared with one year ago, versus up to 23 percent of older generations. This may be due to several factors: younger generations self-report higher levels of burnout and worse overall health compared with older people but are also more exposed to health-related content on social media (where they are more likely to be influenced to make a wellness-related purchase than older generations are).[2]

Despite the wellness sector’s growth over the past several years, consumers report that some of their wellness needs—including cognitive health, mindfulness and mental health, and longevity—remain unmet.[2]

Gen Zers and millennials drive more than

41%

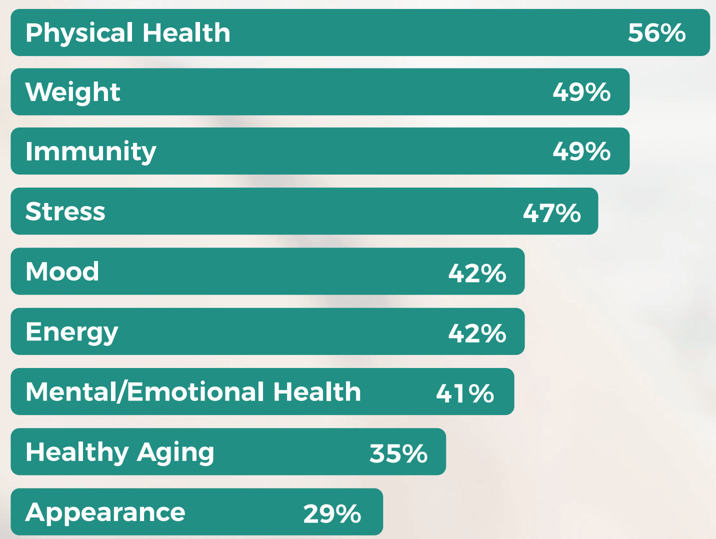
of annual wellness spend.[2]

MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Mental health, mindfulness and stress management are components of overall wellness. **42% of U.S. Gen Z and millennials say mindfulness is a "very high priority,"** compared with 29% of baby boomers. Younger consumers are adopting a range of behaviors and making unexpected purchases, from skincare regimens to sleep hygiene, fitness routine, and socializing in the name of improving their mental well-being[2].

Gut Health Connections

Gut health continues to be in the spotlight as consumers see its relationship to other health areas.



Source: Health Focus International. Gut Health. HealthFocus Consumer Report Highlights. Data source: Gut Health: The Consumer Perspective, a 2024 Global Report from HealthFocus

5

BLURRED LINES OF EATING

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Traditional mealtimes are changing. Consumers are moving away from the standard three meals a day toward more frequent, flexible eating occasions, with snacks increasingly serving as primary meals. Meals are also being replaced by eating occasions as people are more social, getting together not over large meals, but more frequent, smaller eating occasions. This shift is especially seen among younger generations, who view snacks as meal alternatives.[3]

Functional Pleasure

The in-between meal eating is also driving the demand for more enjoyable foods that provide health benefits. **Consumers are willing to pay more for snacks that deliver on multiple benefits,** such as high protein, functional ingredients or convenience.[7]

Turn Snacking into a Mealtime Opportunity

- Focus on food products that are more versatile to fit into various eating occasions
- Develop snacks that offer a meal's nutritional benefits and satiety. Think snack-sized meal kits.
- Target convenience and grab-and-go options

SNACKING accounts for MORE THAN 20% of global food and beverage sales.[7]

6

AI AT THE TABLE

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Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly shaping the food industry, whether companies are early adopters or curious about its potential. Consumers are also engaging with AI, particularly for health and wellness. **Over one-third of Americans (35%) have already used AI tools to manage or learn about their health**, and another 27% would consider doing so in the future. Popular applications include researching medical or wellness topics (31%), meal and recipe planning (25%), weight-loss program design (24%) and learning about supplement usage (21%).[8]

Within the food industry, AI can be used to drive innovation, efficiency and sustainability:

- Product formulation tools: Accelerate R&D time, formulation creation or reformulation and troubleshooting
- Research enhancements: Identify functional properties to create new ingredients and speed research time
- Operational efficiency and sustainability: Streamline supply chains, reduce resource use, improve overall productivity and identify sustainable practices in processing

SOURCES

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