

TOP 10 NUTRITION TRENDS FOR 2012

1. Milk products' unique nutrient package plays an essential role in a healthy diet.

People who consume milk generally have better overall nutrient profiles. Milk boasts higher protein; vitamins A, B12 and D; potassium; magnesium; phosphorus and riboflavin levels than nondairy drinks like soy and almond beverages. Through calcium fortification these alternative beverages can help people meet their calcium needs, but not from natural sources like milk. Associations between adequate milk consumption and disease prevention continue to accumulate, with research showing a lower risk for osteoporosis, high blood pressure, obesity, type 2 diabetes and colon cancer in those with higher milk product intakes.

Consumers often link milk with calcium for health but the nutrient package benefits may not be top of mind. New research shows that milk products contribute only 10 to 13 percent of the energy (calories) in our diets, but 47 percent of our calcium, 65 percent of vitamin D and 42 percent of vitamin A. Milk is also the lowest-cost source of calcium in our food supply, a factor that should not be overlooked by budget-conscious consumers. Education about milk's unique healthy role remains critical.

2. Gut microbes are gaining interest in medical circles; probiotics are the most commonly understood.

There is increasing research interest in human microbe interactions with health and disease. For example, new research is showing that gut microflora play an important role in health and disease prevention. Probiotics, live microorganisms thought to be beneficial to health and often added to yogurt and other dairy products, are one of the best understood of these microbes. They are gaining attention for their multitude of purported health benefits, which

include reducing eczema and allergy, decreasing cholesterol levels, helping manage diabetes, minimizing antibiotic-associated diarrhea and reducing symptoms of lactose intolerance.

However, very few countries allow manufacturers to market probiotics with related health claims. There is increased pressure from marketers and researchers alike to share positive research on probiotics and to better inform consumers. With more dialog on this issue, there will be expanded education opportunities to improve consumer understanding of probiotic health effects. Additional opportunities for dairy-fortified probiotic products abound; however, other products will compete for the market share.

3. Protein's list of health benefits grows.

Consumers are seeking new protein options to gain benefits in weight management, bone health, muscle and fitness. Animal protein—especially dairy—may be superior to plant protein for building muscle. Whey proteins in particular are getting attention for their satiating effects and for building muscle protein. With our aging population, this will be important in prevention of sarcopenia—the degenerative loss of skeletal muscle mass and strength associated with aging.

In addition to total amount and type of protein, the distribution of protein intake throughout the day appears to be critical. New research shows that approximately equivalent amounts of protein at breakfast, lunch and dinner meals (20–30 grams per meal) optimize muscle synthesis. Americans typically “end-load” their days, consuming the most protein at their dinner meals. Overall, dairy contributes about 20 percent of the protein in the U.S. diet, but opportunities for increasing dairy protein at breakfast and lunch abound—think yogurt, milk drinks and smoothies. High quality dairy ingredients will be a big opportunity for flavor, nutrition, functionality and quality.

4. While obesity rate plateaus, incidence of diabetes and metabolic syndrome skyrocket.

Rates of type 2 diabetes (linked to excess body weight) and metabolic syndrome—consisting of central obesity, insulin resistance, high blood lipid levels and high blood pressure—have never been higher. Regular and adequate consumption of milk products has been linked to lower risk of these diseases. While it is important to keep in mind that no single food or ingredient is preventative, research is seeking a possible mechanism, examining components such as whey protein, vitamin D, milk fat, magnesium, potassium and calcium. The DASH dietary pattern, high in fruits, vegetables and low-fat dairy products, is also protective.

The good news about these diseases is that they are preventable and reversible, so it is never too late to adopt healthy habits. Overweight adults burdened with chronic disease who lose even small amounts of weight, become active and improve their diets can extend the length and quality of their lives. Establishing healthy, long-term diet and lifestyle habits is critical.

5. Sodium is center stage: Recent Dietary Guidelines are “aspirational” rather than achievable.

For the first time, government recommendations for specific dietary components such as sodium are perceived by many experts as unrealistic, particularly in the context of other recommendations that need to be met simultaneously. In regard to the 2010 Dietary Guidelines, mathematical modeling reveals the unfeasible nature of these recommendations. For example, it is almost impossible to meet both sodium and potassium recommendations unless we make quantum changes to our eating patterns or our food supply. The food industry continues to reformulate products to lower sodium content, with the challenge to not compromise taste or food safety.

At the same time, some research around sodium conflicts with the new, lower intake recommendations, leading to disagreement among health professionals as to the healthiest intake levels. The lack of consensus and increasing skepticism around recommendations

for sodium and other nutrients could erode the credibility of public health guidelines. Since public health recommendations direct government nutrition programs, they remain relevant to nutrition education. Dairy Council of California will continue to translate broad-based public health recommendations into food choices that are actionable, affirmative, realistic and individualized.

6. Supplements fall off their “can do no wrong” pedestal.

People who use supplements as a “security blanket” against marginally deficient diets, or to boost their nutrient intakes for perceived health benefits, should take a hard look at what they are taking, as research links some supplements to higher rates of mortality. Multivitamins in general and vitamin B6, folic acid, iron, magnesium, zinc and copper in particular have been associated with higher mortality risk among older women. An inappropriate ratio of calcium and phosphorus supplements is also linked to adverse effects on bone health. This is consistent with the “package of nutrients” idea (see #1 above) and supportive of the message to get nutrients from foods first.

7. “Good foods—Bad foods” focus continues to plague the food industry.

Acceptance of positive research on dietary patterns and lifestyles that optimize health and prevent disease is often hampered by the categorization of foods as “good” or “bad.” An example is the quest for a standardized front-of-package (FOP) labeling system that would use checkmarks to indicate how healthy a food is. The focus of FOP systems is generally on negative nutrients (sugars, sodium, trans and saturated fats) rather than positive nutrients (calcium, protein, vitamins and minerals) and on single foods rather than consumption patterns.

In addition, there is renewed emphasis on reducing sweeteners in our food supply, linking sugar intake to obesity, diabetes, metabolic syndrome and other diseases. Taxing foods and beverages with added sugar, imposing age limits for buying soft drinks, imposing a “sugar-free zone” around schools and removing sugar from the GRAS list are some strategies aimed at reducing sugar intake. Improved

health is a complex issue, however. Dairy Council of California and many other nutrition educators believe the focus needs to be on the overall nutritional quality of foods and dietary patterns rather than a single nutrient or dietary component.

8. Restriction-based changes in the school foodservice environment do not translate into healthier kids.

Many recent efforts to improve the health and weight of children through national school breakfast and lunch programs have proven to be less than effective. School districts struggle to meet the new nutrient standards and provide tasteful foods and meals within budgetary limitations. When favorite foods such as pizza and chocolate milk are replaced with alternatives, there are unintended consequences. For example, children often reject the alternatives, discard unappealing items or simply stop eating school meals. Many bring less healthy foods from home or purchase snacks from nearby convenience stores. A few studies have found that there is little, if any, improvement in weight and that the consumption of sugar and “empty calorie” foods is not reduced through such efforts.

One method achieving some success is the Smarter Lunchroom Initiative that redesigns the cafeteria to make the healthiest choice the easiest and most desirable, while still offering a variety of foods. Helping students tap into their own internal motivation to make healthy choices, rather than limiting food choices at school, is key. Nutrition education—versus controlling the environment—needs to be an integral part of future efforts in this area if we are to improve our children’s health.

9. Alternative approaches to eating are gaining a perceived “health halo.”

People who follow a flexitarian eating pattern will plan to eat some meatless meals—for example, Meatless Mondays. There may be a perception that a meatless meal is low-calorie and healthier, which is not necessarily true. There are health risks, especially among those who follow a vegan (no animal food) diet since such diets may not provide enough calcium, iron, zinc, protein or vitamins B12 and D, among other nutrients, to meet health needs. Children who follow these

eating patterns are at special risk of not meeting their needs for growth and development. Well-planned lacto-ovo patterns that include milk products and eggs do a better job of satisfying nutrient needs. An important message to communicate is the “health halo” of eating patterns that includes foods from all the food groups, as each group provides a unique nutrient contribution to the diet.

10. Shifting demographics, social media are changing products and marketing.

Baby boomers are predicted to be significant product influencers and food purchasers in the coming years, with a focus on health and wellness. Products geared toward vitality, joint health and brain health will thrive. Men, an under-targeted demographic, are also expected to be a big influence in the marketplace as they do the food shopping in about one-third of American households.

Social media usage is expanding as more consumers access smart phones and iPads. Mobile marketing will drive the movement as consumers want anytime/anywhere information about food, nutrition and health. Information that is empowering and positive, using words such as “gain energy” versus “lose weight,” appeals to modern values and emotions. Fun, new and unusual modes of marketing will resonate with the non-traditional, adventure-seeking millennial generation.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Produced twice annually by Dairy Council of California, the TRENDS newsletter updates industry leaders on emerging nutrition issues likely to have a positive or negative effect upon the dairy industry. The trends tracking system, monitored by a team of staffers, is designed to identify issues early and track their development through multiple communication channels. Analysis is done biannually on the issues. For more information or to receive a hard copy of the TRENDS newsletter, please contact Kendall House at khouse@dairycouncilofca.org.