

Top 10 Nutrition Trends for 2013

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1) Protein commands attention of nutrition researchers.

Once esteemed only by athletes to build muscle mass, protein's list of benefits is expanding to other groups as well—from dieters in their weight-management efforts to older adults trying to maintain their muscle mass and function. Some authorities believe the current Recommended Dietary Allowance should be reevaluated considering these additional benefits and should be up to 50 percent higher than the current 46 grams per day recommended for women and 56 grams per day for men. Research is focusing on type and timing of protein intake throughout the day to help with body composition, blood pressure, satiety, insulin sensitivity, weight management and other health issues. Some studies suggest that evenly distributing protein consumption throughout the day—on the order of 25–30 grams per eating occasion—optimizes the body's use of protein for muscle anabolism. *Health professionals can help their clients incorporate appropriate amounts of protein into meals and snacks, considering individual factors such as current eating habits and preferences, to help clients attain their health goals. Lean meats, nuts and nut butters, cheese and eggs are high-quality proteins that can fit into most meals and snacks.*

There has been considerable interest in the amount and quality of proteins to meet nutritional needs, especially when considering predicted world population growth. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations recently recommended a new method of measuring protein quality that more accurately measures the amounts of individual amino acids absorbed by the body and the protein's contribution to human amino acid and nitrogen requirements. This method is called the Digestible Indispensable Amino Acid Score. Proteins such as dairy score very high with this new system, as compared to vegetable protein sources. This reflects the high bioavailability of dairy proteins as well as their appropriate ratio of essential amino acids needed for use in the human body.

2) Chronic disease incidence continues to escalate; diabetes and heart disease are front-runners.

It is estimated that one in 10 adults in the United States today is diabetic, and if current trends continue this will reach one in three by 2050. Almost all states have seen increases in diabetes incidence over the past few years, explained by the close association of overweight and type 2 diabetes. Annual estimated costs associated with diabetes are \$18 billion. Lifestyle modification continues to be seen as critical in its prevention and treatment. *Weight loss, physical activity and food intake based on the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans are the cornerstones to diabetes prevention and management. Health professionals can continue to implement these strategies on individual as well as public health levels.*

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 79 million Americans have pre-diabetes, and one-third of adults have high blood pressure, both of which increase the risk for cardiovascular disease. Diet plays a big role in these diseases. Heart-healthy foods being researched include fish oils, green tea, leafy vegetables, nuts, berries, dark chocolate, red wine, whole grains and yogurt. A growing body of research makes it clear that we need to reexamine our long-standing paradigm on the role that saturated fats play in heart disease risk. Some saturated fats such as stearic acid found in dairy products may be neutral or even beneficial in heart disease risk. *Nutrition professionals will need to stay abreast of this research and reevaluate dietary advice as to types and amounts of fats/saturated fats that can be incorporated into heart-healthy diets.*

3) Healthy lifestyle choices, including diet, may increasingly be incentivized.

With the rise in worksite wellness programs, the upcoming implementation of universal health care and the strong evidence that prevention is more effective than treatment, our model of health care is changing. Companies are offering discounts, providing wellness clinics and incentivizing healthy behaviors; hospital chains are facilitating lifestyle changes before writing prescriptions; and registered dietitians, health educators and nurse practitioners are being recruited to help educate patients about healthy habits.

Economic analyses of healthy dietary habits are the basis for these efforts. For example, a recent study in Australia showed that adequate milk and dairy consumption is associated with a savings of up to \$2 billion per year in health care costs associated with hip fracture, hypertension and other chronic diseases. Similar studies have been done on fruit and vegetable consumption. Such analyses emphasize the importance of lifelong adequate consumption of a healthy diet meeting dietary recommendations, and they demonstrate not only the health care savings but also the personal benefits of a healthy diet and lifestyle at all ages. *There are increasing opportunities for allied health professionals to encourage wellness and disease prevention through adoption of healthful diet and lifestyle habits.*

4) Public policy and nutrition education work together to abate obesity.

After years of steadily increasing overweight and obesity rates, some cities such as New York and Los Angeles are showing plateaus or even reductions in childhood obesity. In the past decade, calorie intake has dropped 7 percent in boys and 4 percent in girls. Progress toward controlling the prevalence of overweight/obesity is credited to public health efforts such as exercise programs, revamped school meal regulations, less “junk food” advertising to children, calorie listings on restaurant menus, availability of reduced fat/calorie products and other public policy efforts. Research is focusing on frequency of meals, taste and satiety regulators and other dietary factors as potential causes of weight gain.

As an integral complement to public policy, nutrition education and behavior modification play important roles in obesity prevention. Efforts in school, health care and wellness arenas to promote healthy food choices remain critical to the long-term adoption of healthy habits. Equipping children with skills to form healthy habits at an early age, supporting the importance of balanced family meals and finding time for daily physical activity are examples of strategies that play a role in obesity prevention. *Nutrition educators and public policy experts must work hand-in-hand to achieve the greatest success in reversing the obesity crisis.*

5) Myriad factors confound traditional dietary patterns and food choices.

Consumers are faced with more products on the marketplace today than ever before. Many factors such as cost, nutrition, weight management, environmental impact and animal welfare affect their food choices. Market research shows that consumers, especially Millennials, are willing to pay more for foods that are natural, organic, whole wheat, free range, locally produced, artisanal, with no antibiotics or growth hormones ... and that still taste good. Gluten-free food options continue to increase as celebrities tout the health benefits. Some food labels—such as low-fat, low salt and low sugar—are associated with poor taste and are negative in consumer minds.

There are more beverages than ever on the marketplace—from water, juices and milk to sport and energy drinks, soft drinks and diet beverages—making nutrition education around beverage choices increasingly important. While excess calorie consumption from empty calories should be discouraged, consumers are not always aware of the nutritional differences when they make substitutions in their beverage choices. For example, when choosing orange juice or soy, almond or rice beverages over dairy milk they could be missing out on an irreplaceable package of nutrients—protein, vitamins A and D, riboflavin, calcium, potassium, magnesium and phosphorus. *It is important for health professionals to educate consumers about drinking healthy beverages that meet their calorie and nutrient needs.*



6) Focus on sustainability expands beyond simple carbon footprint.

Sustainability is now a widespread concern, broadening to include food manufacturers, food service personnel and consumers. Leaders in the sustainability dialogue are now recognizing that sustainable diets must consider both environmental costs *and* nutritional contributions of a food. For example, diets that are low in greenhouse gas emissions (GHGE) also need to be nutrient-dense in order to sustain the health of the world's growing population.

All food production has an environmental cost. Current studies on GHGE, using updated methodologies, show that animal food production contributes less GHGE than originally thought. At the same time, food modeling studies suggest that while producing fruits and vegetables doesn't create as much GHGE as raising cattle or livestock, people who consume a plant-based diet may need to eat more of these foods to meet their calorie and nutrient needs ... so the impact of the overall diet may actually be similar to one that includes animal products.

New data show that up to one-half of the world's food is wasted due to inefficiencies at various stages of "farm-to-fork"—harvesting, storage, transportation, marketing, retail/restaurant and consumer. In dollar amounts, the average U.S. family of four wastes between \$1,350 and \$2,275 per year, corresponding to about 20 pounds of food per person per month. *There are numerous opportunities to educate consumers on how to choose more sustainable diets, incorporating a comprehensive approach that includes nutrition, calories and waste in the discussion.*

7) Boomers, Millennials and other groups are shaping new food habits.

As our population continues to diversify, unique subgroups based on age, values and ethnicity are developing. Older adults are turning toward healthier foods to manage their health, looking for "better for you" claims. Gen X and Y shoppers, on the other hand, focus on food for functional purposes such as energy and exercise enhancements. Hispanics are also an increasing force in the marketplace, expected to comprise 30 percent of the U.S. population by 2050. *With the increased diversification of our population, it will be more important than ever for health professionals to identify these subgroups and target advice toward individual tastes, habits and cultures as well as nutritional needs and goals.*

Baby boomers may be leading the way for a comeback in breakfast meals—traditionally recognized as the most important meal of the day. Well known for helping children perform better in schools, breakfast is now thought to help control weight, maintain blood sugar and energy levels and even reduce risk of diabetes. Restaurants are catching on and giving customers what they want—healthful and portable items such as breakfast burritos, breakfast sandwiches and yogurt parfaits—which is contributing to the nearly 20 percent increase in breakfast food sales in the past five years. *Nutrition professionals can emphasize healthy reasons to include breakfast in a daily eating plan, identifying ways to get enough good-quality protein to start the day off right.*

8) Yogurt's "health halo" is due in part to probiotics.

Yogurt sales continue to be strong, driven by innovation of new products, packaging and yogurt's perceived "health halo." Three-quarters of yogurt consumption is reported to be in the home, and it is no longer being eaten just at breakfast but rather at all meals and snacks. The biggest consumers are the 18- to 34-year age group as well as the 45- to 64-year group, but yogurt appeals to people across all age ranges from children to seniors. Due to its extra creaminess and protein, Greek yogurt is driving the strong sales. Yogurt is tolerated well by people with lactose intolerance and increases their options for milk and dairy foods.

The health benefits of yogurt may be due in part to its probiotics. Studies are looking beyond immune and intestinal benefits of probiotics to their role in managing weight, lowering cholesterol levels, improving insulin resistance and even reducing colic in infants. Supplements and foods, including dairy, that showcase these "healthy bugs" will continue to be developed in the future. *While the research is provocative, the range in types and levels of probiotics investigated makes it difficult for health professionals to develop sound communication strategies about benefits for their clients and patients.*



9) Food industry skepticism fuels needs to proactively build consumer trust.

As with any relationship, consumers must trust their food—and the manufacturers of their food—to form a long-term commitment toward purchasing and consuming healthful foods. Trust is built through consistency and transparency: knowing where food comes from, the people who make it, how animals are treated, the origin of recipes and the impact on the environment. To this end, the food industry is increasing efforts to reach out to consumers and build trust through transparency with regard to production practices, communication through various “touch points” and receptivity to consumers’ concerns about health, sustainability and other factors. If food producers and manufacturers fall short, either by lack of transparency or by providing inaccurate or misleading information, they could lose previously loyal customers.

Farmers’ markets are popular, increasing in number by 17 percent in the past year as consumers trust their local farmers and yearn to feel closer to the foods that nourish them and their families. Putting a “face to the farmer” helps consumers draw the connection between the agricultural production of their food and the resulting meal on their plate. *Health professionals can help their clients regain trust of the food supply by encouraging them to contact manufacturers for specific information, steering them away from products with sensationalistic and non-scientific health claims and educating them on certain practices—such as pasteurization, fortification and light processing—that some might construe as unsafe alterations of their food supply.*

10) Retail food outlets respond to changing consumer demands.

The Internet and social media continue to be strong influences in the shopping habits of consumers. With both their pocketbook and health top of mind, consumers are looking to compare prices, prepare shopping lists, find recipes and collect information on food products such as country of origin and nutritional benefits. Others look to retailers for online coupons and help with planning and preparing healthy meals. Retailers are responding by offering digital platforms that build relationships with shoppers; they collect personal data and identify areas of concern such as health issues, the environment, the economy and time-saving strategies with which they can help consumers. Many have developed supermarket loyalty programs and apps that reward their shoppers with personalized discounts and other services. Products offering a healthful array of nutrients, modest contribution to carbon footprint, affordability and versatility will reign in the marketplace. *The best way for health professionals to stay abreast of the changing opportunities in the marketplace is to put their consumer “hat” on themselves and become familiar with what is available to their clients.*

The Dairy Council of California has a Nutrition Trends Task Force which includes 12 staff members, eight of whom are registered dietitians. The Task Force meets three times per year to review the trends in nutrition research, policy and communications. Staff is responsible for tracking a wide variety of publications, both scholarly journals and news media that report on nutrition issues. This summary outlines the top nutrition trends identified and discussed at the winter 2013 meeting.

