

Keeping pace with health and wellness trends



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Consumers are seeking a customized approach to health and wellness.

This is the third in a four-part series covering the Hartman Group's "Driving Growth 2017" symposium. Click to read the [first](#) and [second](#) parts.

SEATTLE — Americans increasingly view foods and beverages as tools for treating or preventing a host of health conditions. What's different today than in years past is consumers are shunning a one-size-fits-all dietary approach in favor of uniquely tailored solutions for managing specific issues.



“Real food is center-stage in this approach ... and in this way of being, consumers have adopted a real do-it-yourself ethos to their approach to health and wellness,” said Shelley Balanko, Ph.D., senior vice-president of business development at the Hartman Group.

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Consumers on average are treating or preventing more than eight health conditions, ranging from anxiety and stress to aches and pains.



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“That’s a lot of spaces in the food and beverage industry for us to connect with consumers,” Dr. Balanko said during the Hartman Group’s “Driving Growth 2017” symposium on Sept. 27 at the Edgewater Hotel in Seattle.

On this path to personalized wellness, consumers are experimenting with a variety of diets. Forty-four per cent of consumers in the past year have adopted a new eating pattern, Dr. Balanko said, citing low-carbohydrate, gluten-free, dairy-free and vegetarian as top approaches, followed by Weight Watchers, whole foods, juice cleanse or detox, vegan, paleo and raw foods.



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“Today’s consumer is more inclined to try these on for a little while, a couple of days, a week or two maybe, and then try something else,” Dr. Balanko noted. “The end result is they have their own personal mash-up of Whole30 before noon and paleo for dinner and something else entirely when it comes to their snacks. And that’s perfectly okay with them because this unique plan of eating is getting them to where they want to be.”

Consumers also have embraced indulgence and celebration as an important part of this holistic approach to health and wellness, she said.

“That’s very unlike the health and wellness of the ‘80s, which was all about restriction and denial,” she said.

In pursuit of a higher quality of life for a longer period of time, consumers are adding foods that promote satiety and good digestion, such as fiber, protein, vitamin D and whole grains, while avoiding salt, soft drinks, saturated fat and artificial ingredients.

Digestive health has become a mainstream priority, paving the way for fermented foods such as kimchi and kombucha. Thirty-eight per cent of consumers are actively adding probiotics to their daily diets, a trend that inspired recent innovation from PepsiCo, Dr. Balanko said, citing the launch of Tropicana Essentials Probiotics beverages.



PepsiCo tapped into the probiotics trend with Tropicana.

Free-from diets, such as gluten-free, dairy-free and meat-free, reflect a more progressive approach to customized health and wellness, as well as an area that has drawn significant investment and acquisition activity recently.

“If you’re thinking about that free-from space ... watch closely because the trends can evolve quite rapidly,” Dr. Balanko cautioned. “Yesterday’s gluten-free might be tomorrow’s low-FODMAP.”

Customized health and wellness represents a major opportunity for packaged food companies, but engaging in the trend requires strategic focus. Tapping into a relatively mainstream benefit, such as digestive health, may be achieved through product renovation or innovation, while acquisition may be a more appropriate pathway for targeting a niche space, Dr. Balanko said.

“We caution against looking for that big benefit to go after that will capture the most consumers because today’s

consumer just doesn't resonate with those kinds of things," she said. "Rather, think about going after multiple niche benefit areas with multiple solutions because in aggregate, that might give you the same big win that you're looking for."