Getting Ahead of the Curve: Food as Medicine

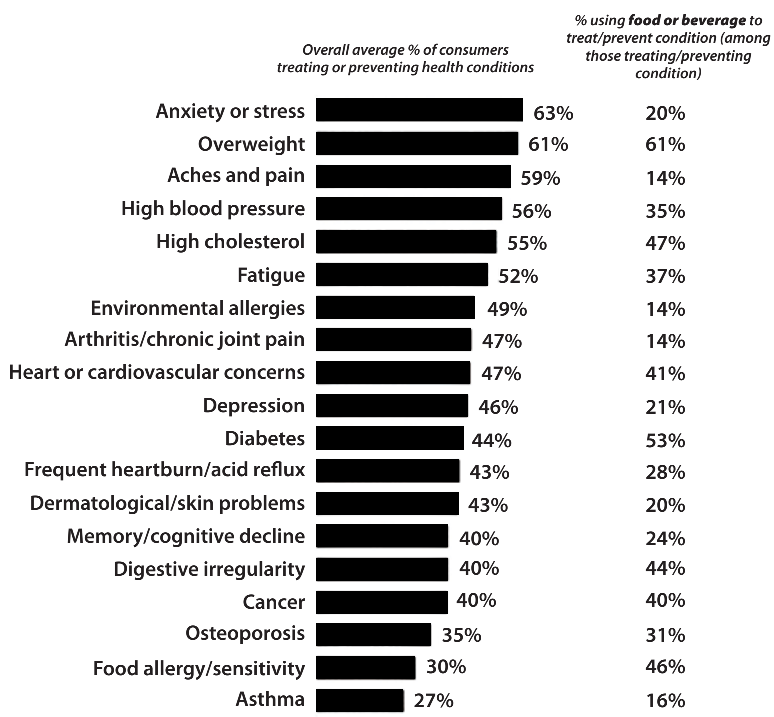
More consumers are looking for specific health benefits from their purchases, compared to passive messages like 'clean label.'

By Dr. A. Elizabeth Sloan & Dr. Catherine Adams Hutt

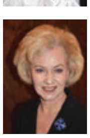
The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated an already aggressive approach to healthy eating. It has focused consumers' attention on prevention of health conditions, vitamins/minerals, immunity, and consideration for at-risk individuals. Most important, it has skyrocketed the "food as medicine" movement.

According to IRI's June 16, 2020 "Charting the Course for Center Store Growth," 35% more consumers are proactively trying to take care of their physical/emotional health now than before the pandemic; 22% have changed their eating habits to be healthier.

FIGURE 1: Food or Beverage as a Remedy for Health Conditions



Source: Hartman Group's 2019 Health + Wellness: From Moderation to Mindfulness report



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In 2019, buying foods for "specific health benefits for my body" surpassed more passive/holistic strategies, e.g., clean, natural, organic, local, and whole foods, for the first time; 61% vs. 48%. By mid-April 2020, 63% were buying for benefits; 53% for holistic reasons, per FMI's 2019 and 2020 "U.S. Grocery Shopper Trends."

Over half of consumers were already dealing with one or more chronic conditions in their household last year, according to the Hartman Group's 2019 "Health + Wellness: From Moderation to Mindfulness." On average, consumers were treating 3.5 conditions and trying to prevent 6.1 (Figure 1).

Further, consumers use food to treat/prevent an average of 2.7 health conditions and use beverages to treat/prevent an average of 1.4 health conditions.

Overweight tops the list of conditions

consumers tried to treat/prevent using food/beverages, followed by diabetes, high cholesterol, food allergies/insensitivities, irregularity, heart concerns, cancer, fatigue, high blood pressure, and osteoporosis, per Hartman.

The pandemic amplified the need to minimize/prevent disease states. During the 8-week COVID period (Mar. 8 to Apr. 26), dollar sales of center store foods/drinks that offered diabetes support increased nine-times 2019 sales, according to IRI. Weight control product sales increased 11-times and moved from negative to positive unit sales. Products aimed at helping control hypertension posted a 22% dollar sales increase vs. 2019.

Globally, four in 10 (38%) consumers always/usually chose foods/beverages for specific medical purposes, up from 30% in 2016, according to HealthFocus International's "2020 Global Trend Study on Shoppers' Journey Towards Living & Eating Healthier." Seven in 10 strongly believe in the food as medicine concept.

Euromonitor's "Health & Wellness 2020" reported worldwide sales of fortified/functional foods at $267 billion in February 2020; naturally healthy foods $259 billion. In 2019, 46% of global consumers purchased functional foods, per Kerry's 2019 Find the Right Format.

While dairy and baby food remain the largest global fortified/functional food categories, Euromonitor predicted that sweet-biscuits, snack bars, and fruit snacks will post the largest gains from 2019 to 2024, followed by functional vegetable/seed oils, baby foods, and breads.

U.S. functional foods/drinks were projected by *Nutrition Business Journal* to grow from $72 billion in 2019 to $88 billion by 2022. As cash strapped consumers turn an eye to value, products with more than one claim will get the nod. According to Mintel's "Nutrition Drinks – US – Feb. 2020," adding an immunity claim to a weight management or general wellness claim on nutritional drinks would motivate 67% of consumers to buy the products vs. 44% for weight alone.

Tasty Solutions for Conditions

Weight loss/management followed by energy, digestive health, heart health, and muscle health/strength top the 2020 list of health benefits consumers most want to get from foods, per IFIC's June 2020 "Food & Health Survey"; heart health tops the list for those over 50 years old. Immunity moved ahead of bone health, brain/emotional health, and sleep vs. 2019; cancer prevention declined slightly (Figure 2).

Managing weight and providing satiety are the top two most desired functional food benefits, per HealthFocus' 2019 USA study. Mintel's 2019 "Diet Trends & Fads" reported that 120 million U.S. adults tried to lose weight last year; 168 million were overweight and 74 million obese, according to the American Heart Association's (AHA) 2020 statistics.

Mintel predicted sales of meal replacement/weight loss beverages will reach $6.5 billion by 2024; 25% of households use meal replacement drinks and 19% weight control beverages. Just over half (53%) of adults associated protein with weight management, 24% satiety, per HealthFocus.

Globally, nearly half of those who buy high-protein foods (59%) do so for weight loss. During the year ending April 2020, 43% of U.S. adults experimented with a dietary regimen: 10% intermittent fasting; 7% each the Whole30 diet or a juice/detox cleanse; 6% Weight Watchers (WW); and 5% each the elimination, ketogenic, or paleo diet, per IFIC. Most important, Hartman's 2019 study found that only 3% who try these diet plans stay on one plan exclusively.

Sales of NutriSystem, WW, Medifast, and Jenny Craig topped $3.2 billion in 2019, up 4% versus 2018, per Marketdata Enterprises' 2020 "Weight Loss & Diet Control Market."

Two-thirds of global moms said they'd be very likely to buy foods that help manage their child's weight, per HealthFocus. Globally, 340 million children aged 5-19 are overweight or obese, according to the World Health Organization (WHO); 34% of U.S. children aged 2-19, per AHA.

Nearly half (47%) of those using food to prevent/manage a condition are aiming at lowering cholesterol, 41% cardiovascular concerns, and 35% high blood pressure, per Hartman. HealthFocus reported 49% are very/extremely concerned about heart disease.

Just over half of U.S. adults have some form of coronary vascular disease, 116 million high blood pressure, 70 million undesirably high LDL, and 46 million low HDL levels, according to AHA. Only half of U.S. children age 6-19 are in the ideal range for blood lipids, 25% are clinically high (Perak et al. *JAMA*, 2019).

Omega-3s, dietary fiber, oats, healthy oils, green tea, garlic, and dark chocolate are among the food ingredients consumers perceive to benefit heart health, per Kerry.

With 1.5 million new cases per year in the U.S., the demand for diabetic-friendly fare continues to grow; 26 million adults are diagnosed with diabetes, and 9.4 million undiagnosed. According to the American Diabetes Association, 92 million have prediabetes; one-third metabolic syndrome, per AHA.

Four in 10 use only foods/supplements to manage blood sugar, 38% both Rx medications and food/supplements, per Kerry. Just over one-quarter (28%) of consumers want foods to help manage blood glucose levels, according to HealthFocus.

Globally, about 463 million adults (20-79 years) were living with diabetes in 2019, per the International Diabetes Federation; 60% of diabetics live in Asia.

Immunity ranks seventh globally among health issues cited that are extremely/very important (54%), per HealthFocus 2020 global survey.

During the 8-week pandemic period, center store foods/beverages with an immunity claim grew 19% in dollar sales and almost doubled 2019 growth. Those products touting a "good source" of vitamin C sold 20% of 2019 dollar sales, antioxidants 18%, in only 15% of the weeks; both going from negative to positive unit sales. Sales of foods touting vitamin D grew 11 times vs. 2019, per IRI.

Right after immunity, improved digestion is the second most important health benefit global shoppers are looking for from food, followed by bone health/strength, enhanced everyday performance, and energy, per HealthFocus. Over half (55%) of global shoppers select foods with digestive health benefits in mind.

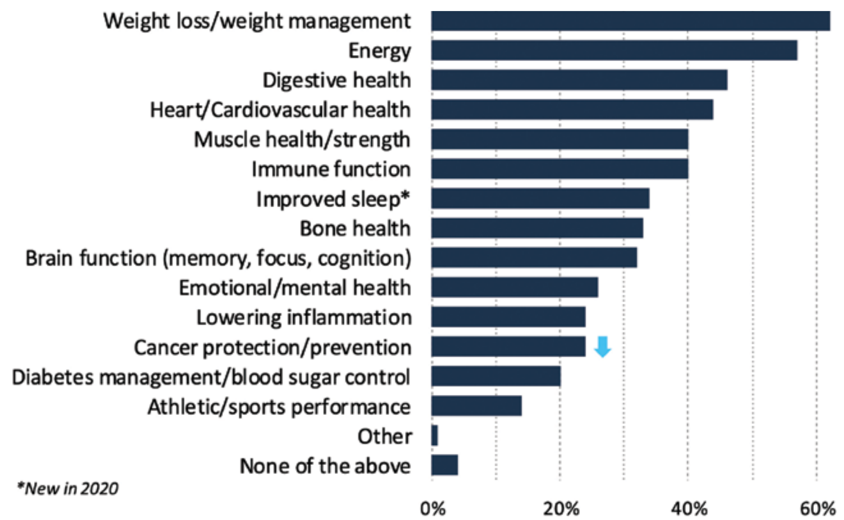
Over half (54%) of global consumers are very interested in the microbiome; 69% believe good digestion has a positive impact on mental health, 68% immunity, 66% daily energy, 65% mood, 64% weight management, 63% aging well, and 63% stress levels (Figure 3).

In the U.S. 44% are trying to prevent/treat digestive irregularity with food; 28% acid reflux/heartburn, per Hartman. In 2019, 43% of consumers tried to consume more probiotic foods; 23% foods with prebiotics.

Bone health is the third most desired functional food benefit and ranks sixth among the health issues Americans are very/extremely concerned about, per HealthFocus. One-third are treating osteoporosis with foods, according to Hartman.

Four in 10 consumers cited muscle health/strength equal to immunity as a benefit they want to get from foods, per IFIC. Three-

FIGURE 2: Top Sought After Health Benefits
(Of Those Who Seek Health Benefits From Foods)



Source: IFIC 2020 Food and Health Survey quarters of those age 50+ are aware of the natural process of muscle loss with aging, per Abbott's 2016 50+ consumer muscle survey.

Everyday Performance

Energy is second only to weight control as the health benefit consumers would most like to get from foods. Over one-third (37%) are trying to treat/prevent fatigue using foods/beverages, per Hartman.

More than half of consumers are extremely/very concerned about tiredness/lack of energy; globally 56% are very/extremely concerned, per HealthFocus.

Vital Pharma's Bang energy drink with creatine, caffeine, and essential amino acids was the number one best-selling new food/beverage in 2019, according to IRI's May 2020 New Product Pacesetters with year one sales of $299 million in mass channels; number two in convenience stores with sales of $734 million.

Less aggressive products that deliver energy for adults aged 50 years and older offer a fast-emerging opportunity.

With mental/emotional balance now as important to eight in 10 consumers as physical health; using foods to help cope with anxiety, stress, relaxation, sleeplessness, and to improve cognition remains a virtually untapped opportunity. One in five are treating/preventing anxiety with foods, per Hartman.

Sales of foods that touted a "good source" of magnesium grew 12 times faster during the 8-week COVID period than in 2019 and went from negative unit sales to positive, per IRI. Brain function (memory, focus, cognition) and emotional health rank ninth and tenth among the health benefits consumers would most like to get from foods in 2020, per IFIC. Retaining mental sharpness with age ranks first among global and U.S. health concerns, per HealthFocus.

Sixty million U.S. consumers took a traditional supplement for brain health in 2019 (e.g., omega-3s, *Ginkgo biloba*, green tea, or combination herbs), per the AARP's "Brain Health & Dietary Supplement Survey."

Prior to the pandemic, retail sales of cannabis edibles were projected to grow from nearly $1.2 billion in 2019 to $4.9 billion in 2024, per Packaged Facts 2019 "Cannabis & CBD." IRI reported CBD food sales grew eight times more in dollar sales during the eight-week COVID period than in 2019.

Four in 10 of those who used a hemp-based CBD food or supplement did so for anxiety, 36% for pain, 34% for relaxation, 29% for sleeplessness, and 24% for depression, according to *NBJ* (2019).

Infant Formula Baby Foods

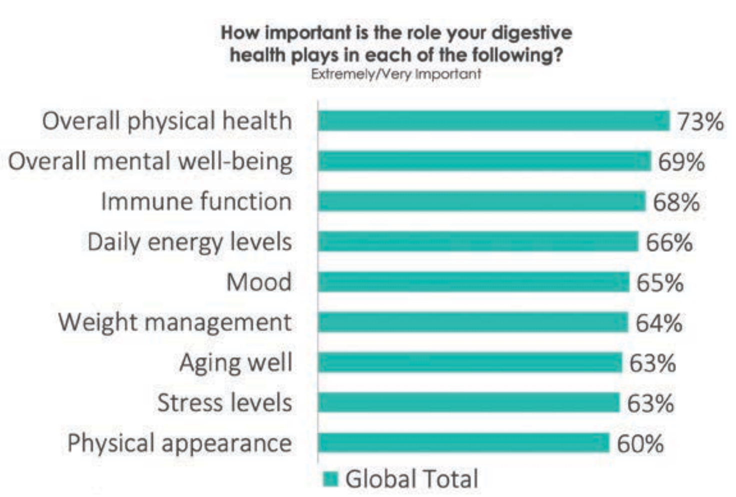
One-quarter of moms want more functional products (e.g., DHA and choline) for children's brain development, per Datassential's 2018 "Functional Food Report."

Abbott's Enfamil NeuroPro formula was the second best-selling new food/drink of 2019 with year-one sales of $230 million. Neuro Pro Milk Fat Globule Membrane says it mimics mother's milk; the products carry claims for immunity and cognitive development.

IRI predicted a Great Lockdown Baby Boom later this year and early 2021. Sales of pregnancy kits have enjoyed low double-digit growth beginning in April.

Households with children are most likely to look for foods/drinks that provide satiety, weight management, energy, improve digestion, immunity and mental alertness, per HealthFocus.

FIGURE 3: Gut Health & Overall Health



Source: HealthFocus International

Food Active Ingredients

Two-thirds of U.S. consumers are looking for everyday foods with health-promoting attributes beyond their inherent benefits, per Kerry's Proactive Health.

According to Hartman's 2020 the "Future of Food Technology," 64% seek out foods/drinks with added vitamins/minerals. One-quarter are aware of nutrient fortification using nanotechnology; one-third are interested in purchasing these products.

In 2019, 31% of supplement users took vitamin D, 28% vitamin C, 21% protein, 20% calcium, 20% B complex, 16% omega-3s, 15% green tea, 14% magnesium, 13% probiotics, 13% iron, 12% turmeric, and 12% vitamin E, per CRN.

Fiber, protein, vitamin D, calcium, nuts/seeds, whole grains, healthier oils, and antioxidants are the ingredients more than half of consumers are increasingly adding to their diet; over four in 10 omega-3s, green tea, and probiotics, per Hartman's Health + Wellness report.

According to Sloan Trends' TrendSense model, potassium is of growing interest in the nutraceuticals category. Potassium was identified as a nutrient of public health concern by the U.S. Dietary Guidelines in 2015 and has been added to mandatory nutrition labeling by the FDA. Potassium plays a key role in muscle function, including heart, and is likely the cause of many muscle cramps. Supplements have been restricted to a maximum of no more than 100 mg/capsule by the FDA since 1975, and getting the recommended 4,700 mg each day is challenging.

When choosing healthy foods, 42% looked for foods that were unique (e.g., superfoods), up 8% from 2019, per FMI. Generation Z and millennials are most likely to do so (54%), vs. boomers/matures (27%).

Fermented foods topped the list of trendy superfoods for 2020 followed by avocado, seeds, exotic fruits, ancient grains, blueberries, nuts, non-dairy milks, beets, and green tea, according to Pollock Communications' annual survey.

Green tea, honey, coffee beans, probiotics, apple cider vinegar, oats, garlic, grapefruit, and dark chocolate are among the top foods that consumers believe deliver functional benefits, per Kerry.

Herbals are the fastest-growing supplement category with sales reaching $9.6 billion, up 10% in 2019, per *NBJ*. Half of supplement users took an herbal last year, per CRN. In March, herbal/homeopathic supplement sales jumped 85% in mainstream and 100% in natural product stores, falling off to an impressive 30% and 35%, respectively, for the 8-week period ending May 17, 2020, per IRI's Jun. 23, 2020"Supporting the Natural Consumer."

In descending order, horehound, Echinacea, turmeric, elderberry, green tea, ivy leaf, garlic, fenugreek, and black cohosh were the best-selling herbal supplements in mass channels. In the natural channel, the best sellers were CBD, turmeric, elderberry, wheatgrass/barley, flaxseed/flax oil, aloe vera, ashwagandha, milk thistle, Echinacea, and oregano, per *HerbalGram*.

With Multi-sponsor Surveys 2019"Nutrition & Dietary Supplement Trends Tracker"reporting awareness of amino acids at 59%, touting amino acids in foods is a highly appealing idea (e.g., theanine in tea or the leucine content of specific proteins for building muscle).

According to the Natural Marketing Institute's 2019"Supplement, OTC, Rx Global Study,"7% of consumers used an amino acid in the past 30 days, 3% a branched chain amino acid. Globally, amino acid usage was 11%, led by Asia at 19%.

Albeit from a small base, mushroom supplements, black seed (cumin), elderberry, chamomile, ashwagandha, moringa, spirulina, blue-green algae, and oregano oil are among the functional ingredients gaining traction in the natural channel, per IRI's natural consumer report

Although 28% have not yet tried a collagen-containing food or beverage, they are interested in doing so; 27% hemp-based CBD, 25% an adaptogen (e.g., matcha or ashwagandha), 24% MCT oils (especially for weight loss), and 16% THC, per Mintel.

Forms & Formats

Nutritional beverages, yogurt, and protein powders are the categories that over 50% of consumers consider for added functionality; bars, cereals, smoothies, and juice by more than 40%; and milk, water, sports drinks, oatmeal, energy drinks, and green tea over one-third, per Kerry.

Bottled water sales topped $18.1 billion for the year ended May 17, 2020 in U.S. multioutlet/convenience stores (MULO+C), per IRI.

PepsiCo's bubly was the fourth best-selling new food product in 2019, with May 17, 2020 MULO sales of $300 million, per IRI; Talking Rain's Sparkling Ice topped $553 million, up 20%. In 2019, value-added healthy waters grew 9% in volume and 10% in retail dollars, per Beverage Marketing Corporation.

Refrigerated ready-to-drink (RTD) teas topped $1.7 billion for the year ended May 17, 2020, up 6% vs 2019; tea bags and loose-leaf tea $1.3 billion, up over 9%, per IRI. Refrigerated RTD coffee sales reached $487 million, up 20%.

Sales in the energy beverage category topped $12.8 billion, per IRI, up over 9%. Energy mixes grew 13.5% to $124.5 million, while energy shot sales fell 8% to $977 million, per IRI.

Non-aseptic sports drinks posted sales of $7 billion for the year ended May 17, up over 7%. The $103 million sports drink mixes sub-segment grew almost 18%.

Protein is being consumed in powders and RTD sports beverages, meal replacements and more. The $4 billion category grew almost 4%, hampered by the cutback in on-the-go eating and gym closures.

In 2019, wellness snacks grew 28% in dollar sales, 1.9% in units; permissibly indulgent snacks 25% and 3.1%, respectively, per IRI's Apr. 14, 2020 "Snacking Lifestyles are Here to Stay." Just over half (54%) of consumers said they want snacks that contain vitamins/minerals, 48% high fiber, and 38% probiotics.

Sales of nutrition/intrinsic value, energy, diet bars reached $3.6 billion in 2019, up 3.7%. All snack, meal, and nutrition bars collectively are projected to reach $8.4 billion by 2024, up from $7.2 in 2019, per Packaged Facts June 2020 Food Outlook. Retail dollar sales of yogurt are forecast to decline with a CAGR of 0.3% to $8.6 billion in 2020; breakfast cereals from $11.8 billion in 2020 to $10.2 billion by 2024.

Claims & Callouts

According to IRI's center store webinar, 87% of food products fail to claim at least one of their top three most searched for attributes; 51% their single most searched for attribute. For example, as shoppers were looking for foods to boost immunity and mental health during COVID, vitamin C searches increased 75-fold, magnesium 26-fold, and vitamin D 18 times.

But callouts are not just important for packaged foods. One in three shoppers want health/nutrition callouts on fresh and packaged produce, per FMI's 2020 "Power of Produce."

Six in 10 millennials believe that meat provides energy; 53% physical strength. One-third (35%) of those aged 65 and older associate meat with mental health and poultry with providing energy, per FMI's 2016"Power of Meat."

Lastly, while some products are perceived as inherently healthy, leaning toward more functional applications might be better. Eight in 10 consumers said they would buy more plant-based milks if they were fortified, per Packaged Facts. *NW*