



IT'S PERSONAL:

Understanding the drivers
of personalized nutrition

In the Western world, where consumers have long relied on the concept of a magic bullet (or a single product to meet the same need for everyone), the idea of personalized medicine has been a long time in coming.

But it seems that today, the concept of a personalized approach to health has arrived. Especially relative to food and beverage choices, people are already focused on getting what they want, when they want it – so it's no surprise that they are now taking their health and wellness into their own hands and looking beyond a one-size-fits-all approach.

That's not to say most people are now relying on technology or DNA testing to answer questions about their health... but they are seeking customized diets to address unique needs and challenges. The question for brands is, how far will this go and how much impact will it have on the food and beverage market?

Whether we saw it coming or not, personalization is already a mega-trend. What's more, Innova Market Insights named the potential for nutrition personalization a top trend for 2021, noting that advances in technology, as well as expanding choices in foodservice and retail, have prompted consumers to take an individual approach to their diet and nutrition.¹

For brands considering opportunity in this space, it's important to understand how consumer attitudes are evolving. According to research firm The Hartman Group, our growing literacy around diet and nutrition is a key factor prompting this shift, as consumers realize that there is no single diet or wellness solution for everyone.² Fragmented perspectives are another driver of this trend, according to *New Nutrition Business*' annual report, "Ten Key Trends in Food Nutrition and Health." The report noted that varied diet beliefs, behaviors and markets, as well as a declining faith in experts – from health care professionals to public health officials – are contributing to the demand for customized health solutions.

Made to fit

Data from a recent Innova consumer survey reported that the demand for personalization is now mainstream.



Nearly two-thirds (64%) of global consumers said they had found new ways to tailor their lives and products they purchase to individual styles, beliefs and needs.³

The survey also suggests that the leading choice for personalizing nutritional experiences was focused on nutritional needs – ahead of lifestyle and body composition.

Another factor at play is the fact that consumers now expect customized experiences. While the idea of a custom or luxury experience has been around for a long time, this concept will likely gain traction as new technologies are developed and more consumer data becomes available.

According to Hartman analysis, the demand for personalized food experiences is already showing up in a variety of areas beyond just a dietary approach, to include how people shop, what they consume and how they prepare their food.⁴

While desire for a custom experience is important, shifting attitudes around health and wellness are certainly a primary motivator, as consumers demand more specific benefits from their products. For foods and beverages, this means that products should adhere to current markers of high quality and inherent functionality, including freshness, minimal processing and nutrient density, and without ingredients such as GMOs, hormones or antibiotics.⁵

While these products don't necessarily have to address a specific health problem, they will increasingly need to be perceived as contributing to wellness in all these ways and be transparent about it.

Consumers are already connecting the dots between mental and emotional wellness and their overall physical health. As this trend evolves, Hartman analysts predict that consumers will likely become increasingly savvy about specific conditions they want to address via a growing awareness of metrics like blood glucose levels and microbiome balance, as well as through technologies becoming more accessible and affordable, such as DNA testing.

Promoting personalization

This understanding will likely lead to further growth of products designed to meet more specific needs. Data from Innova Market Insights shows that personalization has been on the rise since 2016, with strong growth for products offering keto-friendly claims jumping 165% over this period (although this was from a small base and highly regionalized), while products with plant-based positioning jumped 36% and those touting vegan, protein-rich and organic claims also showed solid activity.⁶

Acceptance of these ideas will also open the door for products that address both emotional and physical health, as well as those designed for different generational needs and attitudes. Research from Innova identified common characteristics among generational groups and noted a particular focus on aging well for both seniors and younger demographic groups, both of which are seeking preventive care measures.⁷ The data noted that specific claims around joint and bone health, energy/alertness, immune support and brain health are among the fastest-growing claims in food and beverage products.

Technology will likely take these ideas even further as more personal data becomes accessible and companies continue to innovate.

Mintel suggests that there are three key developing trends to watch in personalization:

1. Products that offer choices based on personal preference, such as beverages that have the ability to control sweetness, varied alcohol content options or meet specific flavor and taste preferences
2. Products that address specific lifestyle needs
3. Products that push the envelope for physiological function and performance, such as food geared toward a specific metabolic type⁸

But this may just be the tip of the iceberg. Personalization is showing up in products like wine and beer tailored to a customer's DNA; scanner technology is now helping consumers identify allergens and assess a product's ingredients and nutrient density, and 3-D printers may eventually help recreate the fibrous texture of steak.⁹

Although these options may not have mainstream availability anytime soon, The Hartman Group predicts that the food and beverage sector is moving toward a market of individuals who will increasingly demand customized and personalized products. The trick for brands will be to stay ahead of this curve, developing products that remain both interesting and relevant in a quickly changing food and beverage culture.

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¹ Innova Market Insights. "Innova Identifies Top 10 Food and Beverage Trends to Accelerate Innovation in 2021." October 21, 2020. <https://www.innovamarketinsights.com/press-release/innova-identifies-top-10-food-and-beverage-trends-to-accelerate-innovation-in-2021>

² The Hartman Group. "Healthy Living and Eating Today: Tapping into Personalized Nutrition." February 25, 2020. <https://www.hartman-group.com/newsletters/1514448038/healthy-living-eating-today-tapping-into-personalized-nutrition>

³ Innova Market Insights. "Tailored to Fit: The Potential for Personalization." November 17, 2020. <https://www.innovamarketinsights.com/press-release/tailored-to-fit-the-potential-for-personalization/>

⁴ Ibid. The Hartman Group.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. Innova Market Insights, "Tailored to Fit."

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Li, D. "Three Key Trends in Personalized Food and Drink." Mintel Food and Drink, China, Blog, July 9, 2020. <https://www.mintel.com/blog/three-key-trends-in-personalized-development-of-food-and-drink>

⁹ François, WA. "Five Food and Beverage Personalization Trends to Watch." EHL Insights. <https://hospitalityinsights.ehl.edu/food-and-beverage-industry-personalization-trends>

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