

Sports nutrition products no longer just for hard-core athletes

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Several trends are fueling mainstream consumer interest in the \$33 billion sports nutrition sector. These include new fitness-focused lifestyles and a desire for faster results from weight loss, energizing, and performance products. There is also a shift in health concerns (especially among women and Millennials), with more emphasis placed on those issues that affect everyday performance. Energy, stress, mental alertness, muscle/joint aches, and immunity were among the everyday performance issues consumers were very or extremely concerned about in 2015, according to HealthFocus.

More than half (53%) of Americans exercised for more than 30 minutes a day on three or more days of the week last year, according to the Gallup-Healthways 2015 Well-Being Index. That represents an all-time high. The National Sporting Goods Assoc.'s (NSGA) 2016 Sports Participation Survey reports that 106 million adults are exercise walkers, 56 million exercise with equipment, 45 million do aerobic exercise, and 45 million run/jog. Moreover, exercise is now the first choice in trying to prevent many health issues, including high blood pressure, fatigue, and stress/anxiety. In fact, exercisers are opting for activity before using supplements, foods/drinks, or over-the-counter products, according to the Hartman Group's Health & Wellness 2015 report.

Savvy marketers such as Post Foods, which acquired Premier Nutrition, Dymatize, and PowerBar, and Hormel, which acquired Muscle Milk maker CytoSport, have entered the sports nutrition arena. Atkins is taking aim at fitness enthusiasts with its new Lift protein bars and

drinks; Mars offers high-protein chocolate bars.

And the future looks promising. Gallup reports that Hispanics and younger consumers—65% of those aged 18–29—are the most likely to exercise regularly. Teen sports participation is also at an all-time high, per NSGA.

Easy to consume on the go tops the list of important product characteristics for performance foods; other priorities, per Mintel's 2015 Nutritional and Performance Drinks—U.S. report, include replacing nutrients lost in exercise, providing balanced nutrients, helping recovery post-exercise, providing a quick energy boost, enhancing exercise performance, and offering long-lasting energy/endurance.

According to IRI's 2016 Taking Stock of CPG Past & Future Report, energy and sports drinks were among the top 10 fastest-growing consumer packaged goods categories in 2015. Nearly half (46%) of consumers aged 18–24 consume sports drinks/mixes when they are not working out; one-third of those aged 55-plus do so, according to Mintel's report on performance drinks. Bars are booming as well. Sales of energy/nutrition bars reached \$4.7 billion in 2015, up 12%, according to Nutrition Business Journal.

Forty-five percent of adults bought a high-protein sports/energy bar in the past month, per Packaged Facts' 2016 Food Formulation and Ingredient Trends. Eighty-seven percent of adults believe that protein builds muscles, and more than 80% agree that it provides extra energy and helps to maintain muscle with aging.

One in five adults look for products formulated with vegetarian protein, led by those aged 25 to 39, as well as Asian and Hispanic consumers, according to Packaged Facts. One-quarter of adults used a sports supplement in 2015, according to the Council on Responsible Nutrition's

2015 Consumer Supplement Survey.

Not surprisingly, mainstream consumers are looking for more multifunctional as well as better-tasting sports foods, bars, and drinks. Clif Organic Energy Food Pizza Margherita sports pouch beverage, designed to replenish electrolytes, is stuffed with pureed tomato and other ingredients to deliver a pizza-like flavor. Mintel reports that 29% of all new global sports/energy beverages introduced between November 2014 and October 2015 carried a mental alertness claim.

With one-third of adults exercising to stay in shape, lose weight, or tone up, per Nielsen's 2015 Global Sports Nutrition Survey, products that affect body composition and tone are increasingly in demand, especially among Baby Boomers. HealthFocus reports that 48% of adults were extremely or very concerned about muscle health/muscle tone in 2015. And perhaps rightly so. Only one in five adults meets the National Institutes of Health guidelines for muscle-strengthening activity, according to a Dept. of Health and Human Services report titled Health, United States, 2014.

Sports nutrition products for seniors that support heart health, joint/bone strength, and muscle maintenance are other untapped ideas. Where are the hydration beverages specifically for exercise walkers, for example?

As for younger consumers, 61% of kids participate in fitness activities, according to the Physical Activity Council's 2016 Participation Report, so [sports](#) bars and beverages formulated for the nutrition needs of active children are product concepts with significant potential.

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