

Nutraceuticals May Be Nearing Tipping Point In U.S. by Karlene Lukovitz, Monday, Jul 14, 2008 5:00 AM ET

Nutraceuticals -- food and beverages that claim to enhance appearance, revive mental acuity and increase resistance to disease - have reached a tipping point in North America, according to new research from the Center for Culinary Development (CCD) and Packaged Facts.

These products have been a huge business in Japan and Europe for years, and their already-impressive growth on this continent is now poised for serious take-off, says the "2008 Culinary Trend Mapping Report on Emerging Health & Wellness."

With more Boomers reaching AARP age every day, and new generations of teens and children who are not only hip to the long-term wellness benefits of healthful diets, but intrigued by beyond-nutrition benefit claims, the average American is already spending \$90 per year on "functional" foods and beverages. That totaled to \$27 billion last year, according to the report.

The report defines five specific "next wave" functional F&B trends:

Foods that offer nutrition by color, which the report dubs "hue-trition," are a trend in the early emergence stage. Heutrition refers to nutrients inherent in the natural pigments of foods, valuable as sources of antioxidants, vitamins and amino acids. The basic concept is that food color can serve as an easy schematic for achieving a balanced diet -- i.e., "eat as many colors as possible." Confections, especially those touting the antioxidant benefits of dark chocolate, are prime vehicles for the "rainbow" movement.

"Beauty" foods and beverages, which contain antioxidants, collagen and other skin-improving compounds, offer gentle, natural ways to look good. These are also a stage-one emerging trend. "Foods that combine function and indulgence, such as yogurt smoothies, superfruit shakes, dark chocolate truffles and collagen-rich fruit candies, are ideal for the beauty message," the researchers note.

Brain-enhancers (AKA "cognitive boosters" or "smart foods") are edibles fortified with amino acids, vitamins and proteins that stimulate brain function. Red Bull's focus-sharpening boost of taurine has made it a "runaway success," and new products emphasizing natural, botanical extracts "should strike gold with the 35+ demographic," say the researchers.

About 450 brain foods and drinks were launched last year, boasting benefits increasingly broader than staying alert. "Brain-sharpening snacks may soon be as pervasive as the morning multivitamin," the analysts predict.

Satiety, or "fill-you-up" foods, aren't new (think oatmeal), but an emerging group rely less on bulk and more on adding fiber, protein and fatty acids to suppress appetite. Other companies are using labeling to position fiber-rich foods like beans and vegetables as "fill-you-up" foods. Satiety labeling is also helping revive low-carb products that lost their mojo after the Atkins craze began to recede.

"Mood foods" contain amino acids that stimulate alpha brainwaves. In North America, mood-conscious consumers are buying beverages such as Glaceau Vitaminwater's b-relaxed, offering B vitamins and thenine. Other companies have gone "super-natural" with mood-activating botanicals. CCD/PF predict a coming wave of products claiming to "evoke mental states appropriate to different times of the day," such as energy in the morning and calm at night.

Immunity-enhancing foods and beverages, like 7-Eleven's Fusion Defense coffee, claim to help ward off illnesses with vitamins, antioxidants or beneficial bacteria. Other examples include Dannon's DanActive yogurt drinks and Green Giant's Immunity Boost frozen vegetables.

Finally, digestive health foods and beverages, which saw their first wave in yogurt and kefir probiotic functionals, are now expanding beyond the dairy aisle. "The bacteria-spiked juice drink Verb: GoodBelly is poised to make big inroads in the U.S. market," according to the report.

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