

CONSUMING
NEWS

Health is the New Wealth: Future Outlooks

By Dr. Cathy Kapica

There was a time when material things, like the number of televisions or computers were most important for defining status. But the world has changed. With obesity a global epidemic, and the rising rates of diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure, especially among children, our lives have taken a renewed focus. We have entered the age of well-being where the emerging status symbol is family health and fitness.

While physical health is important, well-being includes emotional and spiritual health, for which relationships are central, as well as environmental health—a concern for living in harmony with the planet. Converging trends gave birth to the age of well-being, including an aging, affluent population; a growing interest in prevention versus treatment; emerging technologies and scientific advances, and empowered consumers with ready access to information. You may not be aware of these things individually, but taken together, they are impacting the way we live and work. We see its effects on our expectations from food, which is no longer just a nutrition issue, but a moral and social one as well. Here are some examples:

Give us real food with 'clean labels' and no 'issues'

The desire for natural versus highly processed foods and ingredients is rising around the world. Consumers are demanding short ingredient statements with familiar and natural names. This is known as a 'clean' label. We want ingredients that are recognizable as something found in our kitchen. There is also an increasing desire for foods that are 'free' from perceived negative issues, such as: gluten-free, lactose-free, and animal-free (vegetarian/vegan).

We want positives not negatives

"Real food" brings an elevated desire for foods that provide positive nutrient benefits. The debate is changing from the absence of negatives to the presence of positives—from no fat, salt, sugar to vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, protein and naturally nutrient rich. Added nutrients, called fortification, are becoming more about enhancing performance than overcoming deficiency. Omega 3 fatty acids and probiotics are just two examples. Due to the high prevalence of obesity related diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure, foods and diets that offer risk-reduction benefits continue to gain interest, such as foods with plant sterols to lower cholesterol.

We want our food fairly

Sustainable is the new term for foods not only grown using responsible agricultural practices, but where suppliers, employees and the environment are being treated fairly in the process of that food coming to market. These efforts are being measured using new terms like "carbon footprint" and "food mile". A carbon footprint is the total amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases emitted over the life cycle of a product or service. Food miles is a term which refers to the distance food travels from the time of its production until it reaches the consumer. Locally grown is also highly desirable. Consumers who prefer to eat only locally grown foods are now called "localvores".

Organic—now more mainstream

The rise in organic food around the world shows we want quality food that is safe and environmentally friendly. Though many perceive organic foods to be more healthy and nutritious (despite a blanket lack of scientific evidence to support such claims*), the true perception is that they are 'real' and sustainable.

* Science vs. Marketing: Any animal product will have naturally occurring hormones, so to say it is hormone free is a bit misleading. Pesticide residues on food are very small, especially so if you wash or peel produce – less pesticides are good for the environment. Animal products that are antibiotic free, however, are good, because they decrease the likelihood of bacteria becoming resistant to human diseases.

We want nutrition—just for us

A new science—nutrigenomics— is emerging which will be able to determine individual health needs and risk through DNA. Today we already have products that are personalized to life stage needs (prenatal vitamins for pregnant women), gender needs (cereals formulated to give women the extra calcium and iron they need), disease risks (margarines with plant sterols for cholesterol reduction) and age needs (baby food). In the coming years, we will be able to know just who will benefit from things like salt reduction to control blood pressure or probiotics to optimize metabolism, so you can adjust your eating style accordingly.

Health means beauty inside and out

Topically applied creams and lotions are only half the battle against the visible signs of aging, the other half being what you put inside. Emerging evidence suggests that women who eat more sugar tend to have more wrinkles. Functional waters that hydrate (which we know is good for skin) as well as provide nutrients are among the hottest beauty foods. Exotic fruits like pomegranate are available in potions and lotions to address our health needs inside and out. And even men are taking notice of these beauty needs.

The demands of daily life present challenges to our pursuit of well-being. As more women reach their mature years healthier and more active than their parents, a new generation of caregivers emerges. Parents of adults are shopping for, caring for and helping to raise their grandchildren in record numbers—while taking care of their aging parents. But these grandmothers do NOT want to be called grandma, which evokes the image of an old lady in a rocking chair. And, as more women enter and remain the workplace, more men either opt into the primary caretaker role for their children or are more actively involved in their upbringing. Women,

however, continue to be the gatekeepers of household health.

Bombarded with information, more time stressed than ever, women and men are no longer multi-tasking but multi-minding. We're literally carrying multiple agendas, conversations and thoughts in our heads at all times WHILE multi-tasking. It's hard to hear, much less process, all the messages. To filter through the clutter many of us are relying even more on our circle of influencers, such as relatives, friends, trainers, personal shoppers, etc., to help us meet demanding daily agendas.

While health and fitness continue to emerge as the new status symbol and synonym for quality of life, we can move forward incrementally at the very least. What will you do today to take your first steps toward new wealth?

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