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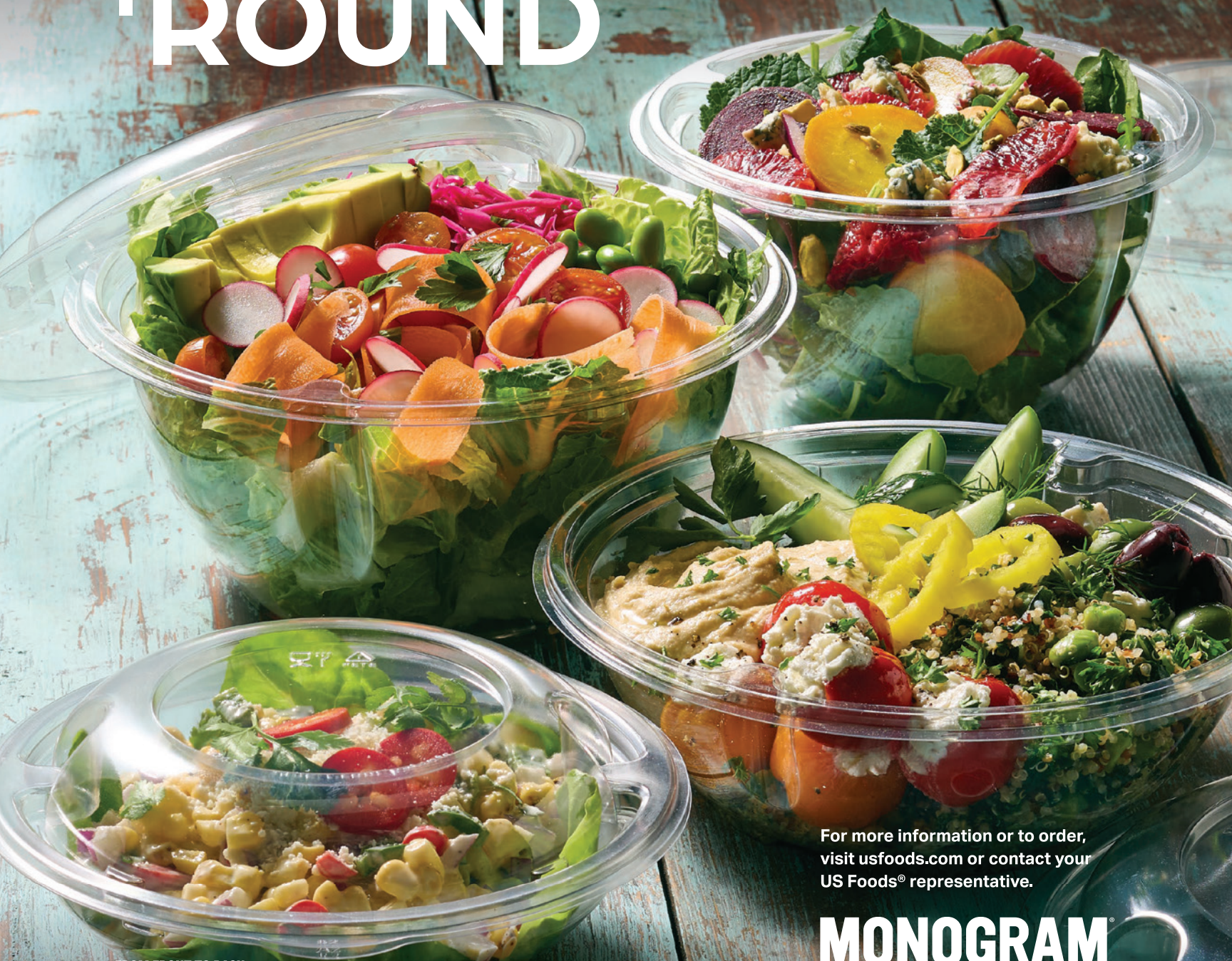
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FOOD FANATICS®

SUMMER 2024

Sharing the Love of Food—Inspiring Business Success

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Fermented foods like kimchi can help improve the gut biome, which researchers say is the gateway to health. See page 33.

ON THE COVER

Inspired by Mott St in Chicago, lean red meat shares the plate with gut-healthy jalapeno yogurt, seasonal onions and signature Everything Sauce.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT ARMENDARIZ. FOOD STYLING BY ADAM PEARSON. PROP STYLING BY AMY PALIWODA

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NORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

Welcome to the health edition of Food Fanatics® Magazine!

Our relationship to food is complex. Among the variety of reasons we eat, food as a function of health remains a driving factor in how consumers make their choices. In our cover story, "Eat to Live," we unpack how such health benefits – whether they be mental, physical or emotional – can not only boost consumers' well-being, but also restaurants' bottom lines.

Strategy. Of course, meeting the demands of the consumer's ever-evolving dietary lifestyle can feel chaotic. In "Bringing Calm to the Plate," we offer solutions for operators to tailor their menus to these cultural shifts, and further detail strategies for operators to identify dietary preferences for profitability in "The Wealth of Health."

Trend. Among trends currently evolving, a focus on gut health remains at the fore, along with non-alcoholic beverages (called "NA," not "mocktails" anymore!), seafood for heart health, and vegetables like broccoli, cabbage and eggplant seeing the limelight. Furthermore, sustainability matters to consumers when selecting restaurants, along with portion control supplied back-of-house.

All health. In hospital settings, food meets dining-out standards, offering both taste and nutrition for patients and workers. Alternately, the restaurant industry has its unique work challenges, which can sometimes lead to mental health issues – a topic we explore in "Well and Good."

A focus on health will only continue to grow in the food industry. So as operations adjust to this demand, we're here to offer tips and advice for keeping your businesses healthy, too.

As always, thanks for reading,

Randy Taylor
Executive Vice President,
Field Operations and Local Sales
US Foods®



The Wealth Of Health

Wellness is impacting the industry like never before—time to harness the opportunities

By Laura Yee
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda



➤ Sweetgreen, which inspired this salad that includes healthful chickpeas, quinoa, tomatoes and shrimp, is expanding its menu to capture the wellness-seeking dinner crowd.

Ask chefs to define “healthy” and the answers will vary just as they would among consumers. The differences depend on circumstances, such as age, dietary preferences, lifestyle and health status. Celebrations call for indulgence while health concerns swerve toward grilled versus fried choices. And some people—consumers and industry folks alike—raise an eyebrow, perplexed: People go to restaurants to indulge, not to eat healthy.

In other words, what people regard as healthy is personal and changes depending on the dining occasion. A recent report by food research firm Datassential identifies such consumer attitudes, opening the door for restaurants to understand and meet diners’ needs at a time when health is more of an influence than it has ever been.

Overall, people see food as a function. Consumers chose “eating right” and exercise as the top two factors of a healthy lifestyle, according to the Datassential study. “While there are many ways to approach health, nothing outweighs the nutritional aspect of food and beverage,” the study notes.

Dietary preferences are aimed at health goals, which restaurants can meet, whether consumers are eschewing red meat to lower cholesterol; preferring vegetarian, paleo or pescatarian options for heart health; or seeking fiber-rich grains and fermented foods like miso and yogurt for gut balance.

“By catering to a wider range of dietary needs, a restaurant can attract more customers, differentiate themselves from competitors and tap into a growing market of people who are seeking specialized dining options,” says Paramjeet “Param” Bombra, the chef at Gulaabo, an Indian restaurant in New York City.

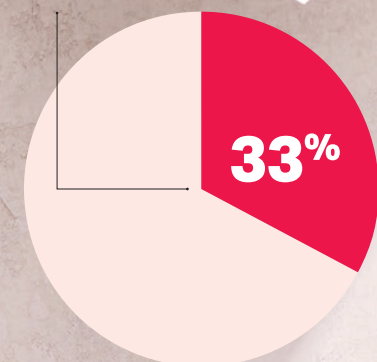
Knowing diner preferences has always been essential for success, but now operators can take that strategy one step further by specifically identifying the dietary options. Chef Johnny Spero reopened his Michelin-star restaurant Reverie in Washington, D.C., with no red

meat on the menu, focusing instead on East Coast seafood and vegetables. “It’s definitely intentional,” he says.

The same applies to Kernel, the automated fast-casual vegan restaurant from Chipotle Mexican Grill Founder Steve Ells, which opened in New York City earlier this year with more locations planned. The approach to options such as the vegetable burger; roasted carrots with farro, dates, spiced almonds and salsa verde; and crunchy cucumbers with wild rice, basil, cilantro, mint chili jam and cashews are all about unprocessed natural foods for human and environmental wellness.

Healthful also extends to mental health. Some 57% of respondents in the Datassential study say their mental and emotional health is more important today than two years ago, compared with 2% who report the opposite. While mood-boosting adaptogens and reishi mushroom-packed drinks can lift a consumer’s spirits, so can indulgence.

First Watch, a national chain of more than 400 breakfast, brunch and lunch restaurants, has long known how to tap into diners interested in wellness by offering seasonal produce for protein-packed dishes along with fresh-squeezed juices. But plenty of indulgent



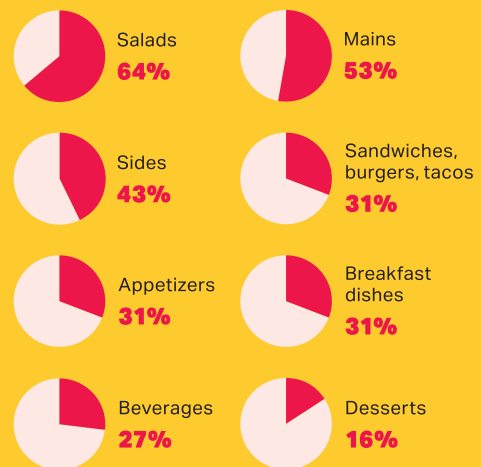
Consumers who would be motivated to choose healthy options if they were customizable or available in a combo meal. French fries with a salad, anyone?

Source: Datassential



Executive Chef Antoine Bailey answers the call for a healthful and seasonal salad with grilled watermelon, tomato and burrata at Pennydrop Bar + Kitchen in St. Louis. Scan the code for the recipe.

WHERE CONSUMERS EXPECT TO FIND HEALTHFUL OPTIONS



Source: Datassential

options are available, such as its signature Chickichanga—a rolled flour tortilla filled with eggs, chicken breast, chorizo, green chiles, cheddar and Monterey Jack cheese, onions and avocado topped with a white sauce, sour cream and seasoned potatoes. The dish, according to the menu, has 1,190 calories and 73 grams of fat.

Chef and cookbook author Daniel Orr, who takes a healthy approach to food, believes chefs overall are reconciling the fact that fat, sugars and salt in their cooking don't always align with diners' diets. When ingredients are seasonal and speak for themselves, less fat is needed, seasonings stand in for salt and natural sweeteners replace refined sugar. At Orr's FARMblooming in Indianapolis, the menu caters to dietary preferences through balance. Customers can find plenty of healthful items, such as vegetable-packed salads with the option to add salmon, but there's also "FarmFamous" garlic fries that can accompany those orders. Some diners joke that the health benefits of turmeric in the accompanying aioli justifies the indulgence. Or the reason lies in the findings of the Datassential report. Far more consumers are interested in a dietary practice than they are in following one. ■

HOW TO FISH FOR COMPLIMENTS



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Eat to Live

Satisfy diners who live to eat with the benefits of functional foods



↓
Patty Neumson interprets her mantra "food is medicine" with balanced dishes like gluten-free crispy frizzy prawns with a sweet soy vinaigrette.

By Laura Yee
Photography by Sean T. McGill



↓
In one bite, betel leaves deliver functional benefits along with the contrasting flavors of toasted coconut, ginger, lime, chili, peanuts and palm sugar sauce at Herb restaurant in Chicago.

In the never-ending pursuit

of the proverbial magic bullet, consumers are turning to food to meet the latest approach to wellness: eating for a specific health function.

Scientists have been studying higher concentrations of nutritional foods to back their disease-fighting and health-supporting benefits for decades, but only in recent years have consumers begun focusing on the idea. The development presents opportunities for restaurants, says a recent survey by food research firm Datassential.

“Functional foods and beverages can drive more revenue and purchases in foodservice,” the study states. “Consumers who are interested in special functional benefits are more likely to purchase items featuring them (and many will even pay more to do so!).”

Some 94% of the respondents are interested in restaurant menus featuring functional foods that lower the risk of cancer while 47% of that figure would pay more. The percentages are similar for heart health and longer life.

Feel good food

The Datassential study revealed that 57% of consumers regard emotional and mental health as more important today than two years ago, a point that vegan-centric Café Gratitude in Southern California takes on. With three locations, the concept has evolved under the direction of Executive Chef Seizan Dreux Ellis to reflect a more cohesive approach to identifying functional benefits, in part through naming menu items by affirmations. For example, at breakfast there’s “I Am Strong,” a double batch of blueberry protein pancakes with almond ricotta, blueberry compote, maple syrup and cinnamon, as well as “I Am Hearty,” a housemade tofu scramble with sautéed mushrooms and spinach, cherry tomato confit, breakfast potatoes, sourdough toast and roasted strawberries (gluten-free buckwheat toast can be substituted for a

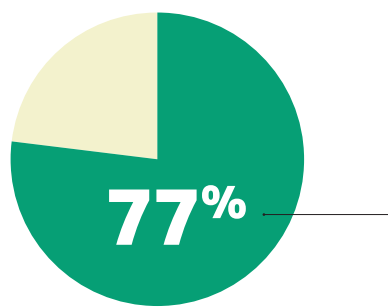


All-natural chicken partners with quinoa, kale, carrots, basil pesto sauce, lemon white balsamic dressing and feta cheese under Power Bowls at First Watch.

\$4.25 upcharge). From the all-day menu: “I Am Beloved,” featuring barbecue lion’s mane brisket and Brussels sprouts in a butternut mac ‘n’ cheese that includes cashew bechamel, almond burrata, yuzu miso marinade, garlic levain breadcrumbs and gremolata, and “I Am Enthusiastic,” a chik’n-fried steak mushroom sandwich with tomato, pickles, romaine, buffalo sauce and ranch dressing on brioche.

Weave it in

First Watch, a Florida-based chain of breakfast, brunch and lunch restaurants, offers plenty of indulgent items but also dedicates menu real estate to the “Healthier Side,” which calls out functional dishes. The Power Wrap, which appeals to consumers cutting fat and seeking heart health and denser nutrients, features cage-free egg whites, turkey, spinach, house-roasted cremini mushrooms and mozzarella in a sun-dried tomato-basil tortilla.



Consumers who believe functional foods/beverages will help them live longer

Source: Datassential



The functions of turmeric, mushrooms and a coconut herbal broth make up a light and ethereal soup at Herb.



Listed under “The Healthier Side,” two poached eggs accompany avocado with olive oil, chives, salt and lemon juice on whole-grain toast at First Watch.



In a section titled “Power Bowls,” the Pesto Chicken Quinoa Bowl brings together “protein-packed quinoa, kale, shredded carrots and house-roasted tomatoes topped with all-natural chicken breast, basil pesto sauce, lemon white balsamic dressing, feta cheese and fresh herbs.”

Brain matters

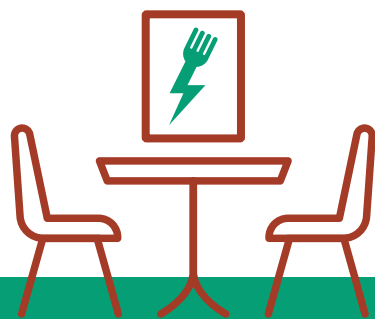
Honeybrains, which positions itself as the “first hospitality brand dedicated to brain health,” is expanding after CEO and Co-founder Marisa Seifan opened the first location in New York’s NoHo in 2016 and followed up with three more locations. Unlike most restaurants, Honeybrains is direct in its approach to “translate the growing scientific research about brain health into enjoyable and accessible foods, drinks, nutrient-based supplements and other products that can help people live

happier, longer and healthier lives.”

The omnivore menu descriptions don’t note specific functions. Instead, the restaurant relies on consumers recognizing healthful ingredients. The Cobb salad, for example, features chicken, turkey bacon, an eight-minute egg, avocado, tomatoes, walnuts, chickpeas and blue cheese—ingredients that check the boxes for a variety of functions, such as heart, brain and gut health—with lower unsaturated fats, high fiber and omega-3 fatty acids.

The Brain Bar, however, is specific and echoes Seifan’s philosophy published on her website. “Substituting processed sugars with natural sweeteners such as raw honey is a simple way to improve your brain health.”

Drinks with an intended function and explanation include Citrus Rosemary, which brings together pear, green apple,



EASY WAYS TO A FUNCTIONAL MENU

Eating foods that provide a function is just one of the many ways consumers try to meet their health goals. Here’s how to help:

● USE YOUR WORDS

A menu can identify better-for-you items by category, but certain words can carry more weight to describe a dish, such as “brain food” or “omega-3s” (fatty acids) to call out salmon’s brain-health attributes.

● MIX IT UP

The customer ordering a fried fish sandwich or a double-patty cheeseburger may want to justify the indulgence, so add nutrient-dense greens like kale to a salad or offer seasonal or grilled lower-cost vegetables.

● OFFER CHOICE

A diner choosing to eat more heart-healthy knows that fried foods aren’t the best choice so be sure to offer grilled, baked or poached alternatives.

● BE SPECIFIC

Train staff to describe prep methods. Serving protein-packed fish that’s coated with breadcrumbs and pan-fried could lead to food waste when the diner expected pan-seared.

● COUPLE THE LIKE-MINDED

Consider pairing ingredients known for their nutrients, such as avocados, beans, tomatoes, yogurt and whole grains—basically fiber-rich whole foods that could make a showing in tacos, sandwiches and salads.

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"Eating healthy doesn't mean sacrificing flavor."

—Patty Neumson, chef/owner of Herb in Chicago



At Herb, pan-seared chive dumplings made with tapioca flour satisfy diners eschewing gluten, meat and dairy for health reasons.



orange, carrot, lemon, fiber gum, ginger and rosemary extract along with a description: "To make memories, our brain cells rely on a neurotransmitter called acetylcholine that helps neurons connect. Herbs like rosemary may improve human memory by making more acetylcholine. When digested, rosemary also stimulates synapses for better communication and retention of new information. Citrus, veggies and fiber have been added to allow for better nutrient absorption."

Taking a functional ethos

For the most part, restaurants rely on consumers to know the function they seek to support, but Patty Neumson, chef-owner of Herb in Chicago, embodies the Hippocrates adage, "Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food," and makes it clear on her website.

"Eating healthy doesn't mean sacrificing flavor," says Neumson, who grew up in Thailand and integrates functional foods with her culinary approach to Thai food.

Neumson layers ingredients for contrasting flavors and textures along with cooking methods that keep dishes light but satisfying. Calling them "holistic meals," her affordably priced tasting menus are available with or without meat and a la carte (\$58 for five courses and up to \$98 for nine courses). Each option begins with fresh betel leaves native to Southeast Asia, which have been used in Ayurvedic medicine for their antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits. Each leaf is topped with toasted coconut, ginger, shallots, lime, chili, peanuts and a palm sugar sauce for a burst of salty, sweet, herbaceous and spicy bite.

One menu item is Turmeric Trio Mushroom Soup made with oyster, king and shimeji mushrooms pureed smooth and poured over tomato, dill and coriander.

"My customers know how I love to cook, and the food has health benefits, but what's most important and has kept them loyal and coming back is that they tell me everything tastes delicious," Neumson says. ■

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Functional ingredients in foods such as salmon, steak, tofu, nuts and avocados provide chefs with many ways to meet diner dietary demands.

NAILING DIETARY DEMANDS

WAYS TO AVOID "MY WAY OR THE HIGHWAY"

By Amber Gibson
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda



↓
The buckwheat pancakes with almond butter that Chef Lucas DePerry makes at Argot in Chicago appeals to gluten-free diners and customers who want a more nutritious breakfast option. Scan the code for the recipe.



SPECIALTY DIETS

—paleo, vegan, pescatarian and the list goes on—show no signs of diminishing as a way consumers approach eating. But is it possible to accommodate so many types on one menu, especially if preferences go out the window when moods change or temptation for indulgence is undeniable?

Menu options that fit into consumer diets—from gluten-free bread and pasta to protein-forward dishes with limited or no carbs and gluten—have become more prevalent. The same could be said of cell- or protein-based meat alternatives and higher-quality, gluten-free substitutes, making it easier to accommodate all diners.

Chefs say they're getting the job done by expanding the menu mix. They're creating options that allow for satisfying substitutions, offering heartier vegetable dishes as starters and entrees and giving more thought overall to their food. Here, they get more specific.

Look to tradition

Whether a restaurant specializes in a specific cuisine—Italian, Indian, Mediterranean—or not, classic or traditional dishes can help meet varying needs and inspire creativity.

"Indian cuisine has the largest vegan and vegetarian recipe bank," says Paramjeet "Param" Bombra, the chef at Gulaabo, an Indian restaurant specializing in Punjabi cuisine that recently opened in Manhattan's Theater District.

Lentils are among Bombra's favorite ingredients for a nutrient-dense, high-protein and high-fiber vegetarian option. "Lentils are extremely versatile and also a great source of vitamins and minerals," he says. "They can be cooked on the stove, prepared in a slow cooker or even pressure-cooked for convenience."



Anomaly SF can accommodate specialty diets with substitute ingredients for a dish like kohlrabi with apples, cashews and avocado puree.

"We have a big larder of crunchy stuff so if somebody is allergic to seeds, we throw in nuts. If they are allergic to nuts, we throw seeds in. If they are allergic to nuts and seeds, we use puffed rice."

—Chef Mike Lanham, Anomaly SF in San Francisco

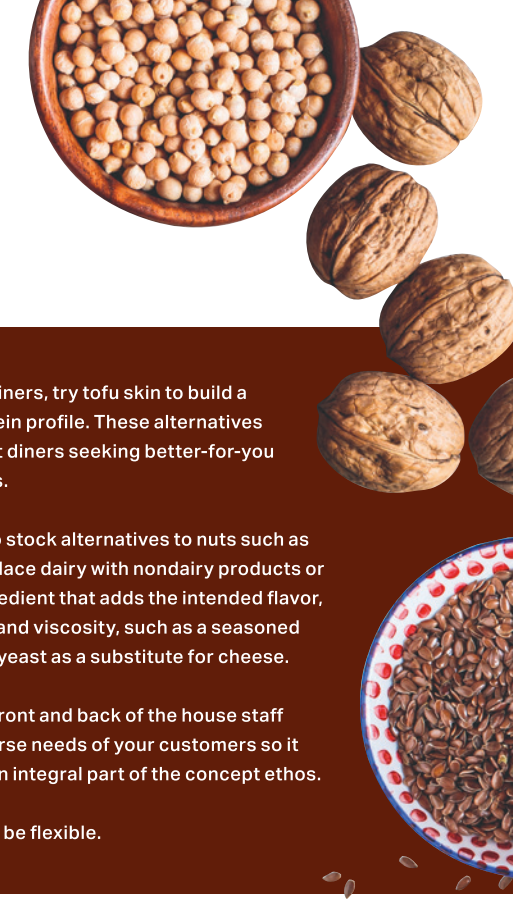


Brush Sushi in Atlanta can meet the needs of paleo, gluten-free and pescatarian diets with a sashimi melange that includes tuna, a fast-growing seafood preference among diners. See page 72 and Scan the code for the recipe.





A superfood loaded with Vitamin A, sweet potato is the core ingredient for Shakarkand Ki Chaat, a sweet and savory vegan dish at Gulaabo in New York City. Scan the code for the recipe.



HOW TO PLEASE EVERYONE WITH A DIETARY NEED

- Look to cuisines that traditionally fall into the preference. For example, Indian and Middle Eastern for vegetarians; Mediterranean and Japanese for pescatarians.
- Offer more plant-based, whole foods as starters and center of the plate. See story on page 22 for underdog vegetables emerging as bona fide menu stars.
- Consider higher-protein grains such as buckwheat, millet and flour blends with chickpea or cassava for gluten-free substitutions. For

- meatless diners, try tofu skin to build a dish's protein profile. These alternatives also attract diners seeking better-for-you ingredients.
- Be sure to stock alternatives to nuts such as seeds. Replace dairy with nondairy products or use an ingredient that adds the intended flavor, mouthfeel and viscosity, such as a seasoned nutritional yeast as a substitute for cheese.
- Educate front and back of the house staff on the diverse needs of your customers so it becomes an integral part of the concept ethos.
- Above all, be flexible.

At Gulaabo, aloo wadi lentil fritters are a popular vegetarian entree, and Bombra recommends lentils for salads, soups and stews and blended into dips and spreads. Another bestseller: shakarkand ki chaat, fried sweet potato cubes tossed with tamarind and mint chutney, chaat masala and cumin, topped with crushed roasted peanuts.

Bombra has seen plant-based cuisine growing more popular, and estimates that 40% of food sales are vegetarian dishes on a menu that's 50% meatless.

Keep substitutes on hand

At Anomaly SF in San Francisco, Chef Mike Lanham and his team accommodate dietary restrictions, which can be a challenge for an 11-course tasting menu. Advance notice is requested, but he says the team can meet the demands of vegan, gluten-free or pescatarian diners on the fly with substitutes that perform the same role in a dish.

"The whole purpose of a restaurant is that the guest leaves happy," Lanham says. "Just to know that somebody cares enough to make the effort makes people happy. And when it's good on top of that, they're really happy. It takes us

extra time, but in most cases it's just a tweak here or there."

Lanham's kohlrabi salad with smoked cashew, avocado, apple and shiso is easy to adapt for various dietary restrictions. For tree nut allergies, the team can substitute sunflower seeds. They also can make the avocado green goddess dressing without dairy. "We have a big larder of crunchy stuff, so if somebody is allergic to seeds, we throw in nuts," Lanham says. "If they are allergic to nuts and seeds, we use puffed rice."

Lanham always has several ripe avocados in the walk-in for vegans and vegetarians. "Avocado is like a premade puree," he says. "Throw it in the blender, hit it with some spice or smoke, and it's a pretty quick path to something that's really delicious and gets you to where you need to be." He also keeps coconut milk on hand and has several sorbets in the freezer.

If a diner is lactose-intolerant but not allergic to dairy, he substitutes butter for cream. "We blend butter into soups all the time and that works," he says. Or he might opt for goat dairy as a non-lactose substitute.

Lanham's restaurant has become known for making substitutions, which he says is good for business. He estimates that Anomaly SF receives 25% more guests than they would if they didn't accommodate restrictions. "We wouldn't have made it through the first year without doing dietary restrictions," he says.

Be flexible

Hill Street in Door County, Wisconsin, has a no-substitutions policy, but owners Karin and Scott Watts nevertheless designed their menu to adapt to dietary restrictions. "Since we are restricting our guests' ability to customize their own experience, we have tried our best to have a very accessible menu despite our strict substitution policy," Karin Watts says. There's a vegan sandwich and several gluten-free and dairy-free options. Half the menu is vegetarian.

"My brother-in-law (Andrew) has celiac disease and is also dairy-intolerant, so we tend to think of what he can eat as shorthand for if we are checking all the restriction boxes," she says. Hill Street's pozole, a hearty Mexican pork and hominy stew with a rich base and multiple garnishes, is his favorite dish on the menu. ■

RUN WITH THE UNDERDOGS



BROCCOLI, CABBAGE AND EGGPLANT POWER UP

By Amber Gibson and Laura Yee
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda



↓
Roasted broccoli on seasoned Greek yogurt, candied pecans, jalapenos, cherries and black garlic vinaigrette check all the healthful boxes. Scan the code for the recipe.



SOME COMMONERS ARE POISED FOR ROYALTY.

Humble vegetables served at home or rooted in peasant cooking—broccoli, cabbage and eggplant, among others—are the most underrated and overlooked in the walk-in. But as vegetables rise in popularity, in part thanks to their nutritional attributes, they're gaining upper echelon status, especially those with lower costs.

For Sean Pharr, broccoli has been prevalent throughout his career, whether in the form of the Alain Ducasse broccoli mousse, a filling for agnolotti or a broccoli cheddar fritter at an after-hours bar. At his produce-forward restaurant Mint Mark in Madison, Wisconsin, he's determined to make broccoli a craveable marquee attraction.

Changing minds with inventive approaches

"Many childhood dinner atrocities of over-boiled broccoli have left my customers wary of center-of-the-plate vegetable features," he says. His crispy Parmesan broccoli with Calabrian chili crisp is his secret weapon for getting adults to eat their veggies. This spicy, savory dish is a flavor bomb—a sharp contrast to tasteless mushy broccoli from a school cafeteria.

Hello Monty in Chattanooga, Tennessee, uses a similar flavor profile for fire-roasted broccoli with Parmesan crisps, chili oil, Parmesan dressing and almond citrus crumble. Co-owner Rob Gentry imparts a smoky flavor with Mibrasa charcoal ovens after marinating the broccoli for 12 to 24 hours with garlic oil, gochugaru and salt. "We take the broccoli out of the marinade and partially roast it in our ovens, hold it cold, then finish it again over fire. This two-step process allows us to achieve a nice color and reduces cooking time."

While some chefs have long featured cabbage, the humble vegetable is making a big splash on menus as diners discover that the low-cost



Eggplant Frites with Harissa*

*Chef/owner Steven Satterfield
Miller Union, Atlanta*

2 smoky dried chiles, such as chipotle, oncho or morita

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 pound sweet red peppers, diced

2 shallots, diced

2 cloves garlic, minced

1½ teaspoons kosher salt, plus ½ cup

1 teaspoon ground caraway

1 teaspoon ground coriander

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1 tablespoon tomato paste

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

1½ pounds Japanese eggplant, peeled

1 cup cornstarch

½ rice flour

Canola oil, as needed for frying

Flaky sea salt for finishing

Piment d'Espelette, as needed

Coarsely chopped parsley for garnish

Rehydrate chiles; drain and set aside. Heat oil over medium heat and sauté peppers, shallots, garlic and 1½ teaspoons salt. Add chilies, caraway, coriander and cumin and stir until softened, about 5 minutes. Add tomato paste and lemon juice and cook to caramelize. Remove from heat and blend until smooth; adjust seasoning if needed. Set aside harissa.

Combine remaining ½ cup salt with 1 gallon of water and add eggplant sliced into ¾-inch-thick and 4-inch-long sticks like fries. Brine 1 to 2 hours; drain. Combine cornstarch and rice flour and coat eggplant. Transfer eggplant to a baking sheet, shaking off excess cornstarch. Fry in canola oil heated to 350 F until golden brown. Sprinkle with salt, piment d'Espelette and parsley. Serve with harissa.

**Adapted from Vegetable Revelations:
Inspiration for Produce-Forward Cooking by
Steven Satterfield.*



Low food cost, high nutritional value and its plant-forward appeal makes fire-roasted broccoli with Parmesan dressing, almond-citrus crumble, chili oil and Parmesan crisp a big seller at Hello Monty in Chattanooga, Tennessee.



➔ Broccoli provides enough tooth for a meatless sandwich with soy and honey peanut sauce, pickled onions and peanuts at Hill Street in Fish Creek, Wisconsin.

vegetable is considered an overlooked superfood. Like broccoli, charring the vegetable and pairing it with unlikely ingredients makes it a go-to dish. At Lilia in Brooklyn, New York, Chef-owner Missy Robbins separates the leaves, chars them over a wood fire to impart a pleasant smokiness and serves them in a caraway-infused brown butter showered with crispy shallots.

Cabbage also lands at Harry's Fine Foods in Seattle. Savoy cabbage is roasted and paired with muhammara, Oregon hazelnuts and pomegranate molasses, while in Denver at Sap Sua, the vegetable is charred but gets a salty umami blast with anchovy breadcrumbs.

"Texture is really important as well as finding opportunities for pops of flavor," says Chef Lena Ciardullo at New York's Union Square Cafe. She lays roasted broccoli florets mixed with cherries, candied pecans and sliced jalapenos over seasoned Greek yogurt to create a crunchy and creamy contrast, topped with more pecans,

cherries and drizzled black garlic balsamic vinaigrette. Using broccoli and other lower-cost produce "allows us to use additional ingredients that are more expensive like black garlic and pecans to make it nice."

Eggplant is known for its use in Middle Eastern and Italian American heritage, but the nightshade is venturing beyond tradition (think baba ghanoush and eggplant parmigiana). "Pops of flavor" come into play at Le Farfalle in Charleston, South Carolina, where eggplant is pickled to accompany octopus carpaccio, roasted tomatoes and fett'unta (bread). The inventive Italian restaurant also turns eggplant into chips to add texture to buccatini with tomato, chili and ricotta salada.

It's all about the treatment

Texture is especially important with eggplant. Cooked well, it can be whipped, like at Sifr,

self-described as a modern Middle Eastern restaurant. The Chicago establishment doesn't refer to it as baba ghanoush, but rather Tunisian eggplant. Creamy and light, the dish begins with a layer of whipped eggplant followed by yogurt, herbs and pine nuts for crunch.

Increasingly, eggplant stands in as a healthier french fry. House-cut fries are the standard at Steven Satterfield's Miller Union in Atlanta, but the chef-owner also features crispy eggplant frites. Otium Grill & Greens in Seattle follows that route but with a different preparation method. They're dipped in a tempura batter, fried and served with "Mama Lil's peppers" and spicy chili sauce.

Hearty like a meal

Cabbage can be hearty, depending on the way it is prepared. Nancy Silverton and her team at Chi Spacca in Los Angeles slice cabbage into thick cone shapes and stuff them with 'nduja, served

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AWAY FROM HOME



Charred Cabbage with Ssamjang butter

Chef/owner Andrew Zimmerman
Proxi, Chicago

- 1 large head cabbage, preferably savoy
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoons water
- 1 cup ssamjang butter, recipe follows
- 4 tablespoons fried shallot crunch, recipe follows

Remove outer leaves from the cabbage and trim stem. Cut into four equal wedges, keeping the core intact, and place cut-side down into a cast-iron pan in a single layer. Drizzle oil to coat and season with salt. Cook undisturbed for 12 minutes in a charcoal fire, gas grill or 500 F preheated oven and check for a silky, yielding quality for doneness.

Bring vinegar and water to almost a simmer and whisk in ssamjang butter to create an emulsion; keep warm.

Transfer cabbage to cutting board, cut the core out and divide the leaves evenly among four bowls. Spoon ssamjang sauce over cabbage and top with fried shallot crunch. Makes 4 servings.

To make ssamjang butter: Combine ½ pound softened unsalted butter with 2 tablespoons ssamjang seasoning paste in a food processor until smooth.

To make fried shallot crunch: Combine 2 cups fried shallots with 3 tablespoons finely chopped nori seaweed, 1 tablespoon Korean red chili flakes (gochugaru) and 1 teaspoon Red Boat fish sauce salt.



75%

Consumers attracted to an item or "whole food" that naturally provides functional health benefits

Source: Datassential



Crispy Broccoli Capeado in a tomato broth with lime crema headlines a first course at Alma Fonda Fina, Chef/owner Johnny Curiel's restaurant in Denver. Dishes like this appeal to one third of diners eating more vegetables than a year ago and 38% who anticipate eating even more during the next year, according to Datassential.

in a pool of taleggio fondue surrounded by a bright green ring of scallion oil.

In Baltimore at Venezuelan-inspired Alma Cocina Latina, Eggplant Tarkari is lauded by diners as a stellar main dish. Chef Héctor Romero serves it fricassee-style in a Trinidadian curry with a smoky aji dulce and eggplant frites. A tangy garam masala-spiced goat yogurt and basmati rice accompany the dish.

At Hill Street in Door County, broccoli appears on the menu three times, including crunchy charred broccoli served as a sandwich with soy and honey peanut sauce. "Broccoli has some tooth, so you get a primal sensation when you bite into it," co-owner Karin Watts says. "Even meatheads don't feel like they're missing anything with this sandwich, which speaks to broccoli's often-overlooked status as a top dog vegetable."

Executive Chef Chris Jung wanted to make a broccoli dish feel substantial at Maxwells Trading and riffed on a steak dish, treating broccoli as he would a protein while serving it with a puree and a sauce. "Maintain the natural sweetness and earthiness of the broccoli while still using it as a delicious vehicle for stronger flavors," he says. Jung begins with a buttery, cheesy broccoli puree, then doubles down with blanched and grilled broccoli stems and braised shiitake mushrooms before finishing the dish with gremolata and crunchy breadcrumbs as a garnish.

"I also recommend blanching broccoli before adding direct heat," Jung says. "Too much direct contact on high heat will destroy the texture of the broccoli before the center is fully cooked."

“Maintain the natural sweetness and earthiness of the broccoli while still using it as a delicious vehicle for stronger flavors.”

—Chef Chris Jung, Maxwells Trading, Chicago



Broccoli, Broccoli Puree, Shiitake and Breadcrumbs Salsa

*Chefs Erling Wu-Bower and Chris Jung
Maxwells Trading, Chicago*

- 250 grams onions
- 300 grams unsalted butter, divided use
- 500 grams broccoli, stems peeled, diced large
- 70 grams white wine
- 680 grams vegetable stock, divided use
- 75 grams pecorino in chunks
- 75 grams Parmesan in chunks
- 6 grams garlic, sliced
- 3 grams ginger, sliced
- Cooking oil, as needed
- 14 dried shiitake mushrooms, rehydrated, reserve soaking liquid
- 40 grams vegetarian oyster sauce
- 20 grams Chinese dark soy sauce
- 15 grams rice wine vinegar
- 15 grams sherry vinegar
- 14 grams sugar
- 14 grams sesame oil
- Kosher salt, extra-virgin olive oil and lemon juice, as needed
- Breadcrumb salsa, recipe follows

Saute onions in 200 grams butter but do not brown. Add broccoli stems and cook through. Deglaze with white wine; add 205 grams vegetable stock and puree while hot, adding pecorino and Parmesan cheese while blending. Add remaining 100 grams cold butter in cubes; keep warm.

Saute garlic and ginger in oil and add shiitakes; saute. Add remaining seasonings (except salt, lemon juice and EVOO), remaining 475 grams stock and reserved soaking liquid, about 225 grams. Braise 30 to 40 minutes.

Grill broccoli stalks and toss with lemon juice, salt and EVOO. At service, add puree to the plate, top with broccoli and garnish with breadcrumbs. Mound shiitakes by broccoli.

To make breadcrumb salsa: Combine 20 grams minced parsley with 15 grams minced capers and 1 minced garlic clove. Add 90 grams extra-virgin olive oil, juice of ½ lemon and 2 grams kosher salt. At service, stir in 20 grams toasted breadcrumbs. ■

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GUT



FEELING



Housemade cucumber vinegar, kimchi, nutritional yeast and yogurt are all vehicles to creating a healthy gut biome.

By Amber Gibson
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda

Good health starts in the digestive system—a connection that gives chefs an advantage to meet diners' needs

Of all the specialty diets

aimed at achieving a healthier lifestyle, declaring your menu as gut-healthy doesn't exactly ring the bell that signals salivating. But ingredients that promote gut health are among the favorites in a chef's arsenal, from yogurt to all things fermented. Expect to see more gut-healthy dishes across the menu, many of which have been present but are now being called out and getting new cred.

Gut health plays an important role in menu development for Davin Waite, executive chef and co-founder of plant-based restaurant The Plot, which has three locations in Southern California. Housemade fermented ingredients including krauts, kimchi, sourdough and yogurt all benefit the gut biome.

"Sourcing organically and regeneratively is always going to be better for gut health, as a result of the increased microbial diversity in

the soil," Waite says. Kraut and kimchi make appearances frequently in dishes, like a beet Reuben sandwich with sauerkraut, grilled cabbage with kimchi and lentil caviar, and roasted cauliflower with kimchi and a "fishless" fish sauce made with seaweed and ginger. "Polysaccharides and polyphenols from brown and green seaweeds enhance the abundance of beneficial bacteria and their production of short chain fatty acids in the gut," Waite explains.

Options are plentiful

In addition to kimchi and kraut, Waite's colleague Chef Bryan Balzer uses lacto fermentation to make cultured yogurt, which he includes in tzatziki as well as cheese sauce. Balzer also ferments sourdough to make breads and pasta. Some lactic acid bacteria strains in sourdough starter are considered probiotics, which have potential for improving gastrointestinal health.

"We let our guests know that our breads and pasta are much more tolerable for those with sensitivities to gluten than conventional flour and breads that haven't been fermented," Waite says. "We walk the line of making sure our team is well informed and can share this information if our guests are interested, while still appealing to those who might not be interested in being educated about gut health when dining. We think it is something that will catch on as more people better understand the connection between gut health and physical and mental health."

Integrate throughout

Kari Kihara, the chef at Hayward in McMinnville, Oregon, uses house ferments and whole grains throughout her menu, including flour from locally grown grains milled in Oregon and Washington for more nutritious sourdough bread, batters, pastries and crackers. "I love the taste of sourdough and always lean towards it, but it is absolutely an added bonus that it is way better on our bodies," Kihara says. Plus, fermentation helps preserve peak seasonal produce to add bright



Kimchi can stand alone or up the umami in fried chicken sandwiches like Shake Shack has done. Many restaurants are also adding it to aioli as a dipping sauce or spread.

Housemade fresh cucumber juice with vodka is one of the ways Chef Jonathan Sawyer makes gut-healthy vinegar through fermentation for any dish calling for a splash of acid.

accents to her food, and her seasonal pickle plate is one of her most popular starters.

"Most of our guests aren't coming in looking for a healthy meal per se," she says. "They are looking for a full experience, and when they want the knowledge, our team will always provide it. Our fermentation and larder program is full of house-made vinegars, misos and pickles that help us create the type of food we want to eat, which always is flavor-first, and thankfully it naturally leads to good gut health, too."

For guests who are more interested in the nutrition and health behind fermentation, Kihara is hosting a workshop for the first

time this fall to teach basic vegetable fermentation and how to use them in recipes—for example, making fermented corn and using it to bake cornbread.

Feel-good food

Aidan Owens, the chef at Herb & Sea in Encinitas, California, proudly displays colorful jars of house ferments where guests can see them, often prompting questions that lead to thoughtful conversations and educational opportunities. He credits Sandor Katz's book "The Art of Fermentation" for sparking his interest in fermented foods.

"An imbalance of gut bacteria has been linked to the development of disorders such as inflammatory bowel disease, immunodeficiency, hypertension, type-2-diabetes, obesity and cancer."

—National Institutes of Health



Consumers are cutting red meat intake, but some experts say lean beef is important for a balanced diet. Inspired by Mott St in Chicago, this dish also includes a jalapeno yogurt for gut health, grilled spring onions and Everything Sauce.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The dos and don'ts for winning over diners with gut health

Consumers who want to eat healthier—57%, according to a Datassential study—might find foods that promote a healthy gut appealing.

- ✔ **DO** train servers to be knowledgeable about yogurt, miso, fermented foods and seaweed known for their gut-healthy properties.
- ✔ **DO** call out fiber-rich foods such as beans and lentils, also good for gut health.
- ✔ **DO** get creative with salad dressing and spicing yogurt-based accompaniments.
- ✔ **DO** offer fermented foods such as pickled vegetables, including kimchi, as side dishes.
- ✘ **DON'T** make health claims.
- ✘ **DON'T** offer gut-healthy food if it doesn't make sense with the concept.

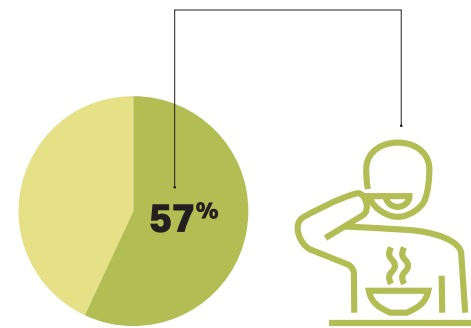
"Ferments are crazy-good for you, and they taste crazy-good," he says. "I'm susceptible to things hurting my stomach, and when I make my menu, I try to be very conscious of how you will feel. I want people to leave my restaurant and be able to go on a hike, not feel like a heavy lump." Owens also cooks his food in natural oils like tallow versus processed seed oils and makes cheese, butter, yogurt and creme fraiche inhouse, which have a higher probiotic count than commercial varieties.

Look across the globe

Many traditional foods across the globe, from Korean kimchi to Ayurvedic kitchari, are also good for gut health. For example, Chef Shamim Popal's menu at Lapis, a modern Afghan restaurant in Washington, D.C., features gut-

friendly ingredients like garlic yogurt spread with Afghan flatbread, high-fiber orange lentil soup, vinegar-based salad dressings, pickles and high-fiber fruits like plums and apples. "Gut health has been a concern since I was cooking at home for my children," Popal says. "As I was creating the menu for Lapis, I realized that wow, our (Afghan) food is really so healthy." About half of her menu is gluten-free and dairy-free and labeled as such.

"I'm mostly vegetarian," Popal says. "I do eat meat but not very often. When I go out and eat, I find that I'm always bloated afterwards. Because we use so many digestive spices like ginger, garlic, turmeric and cumin, you don't feel bloated. Our guests love it, and they keep coming back for our healthy, gut-friendly foods." ■



Consumers who want to eat healthier
Source: Datassential

Walnut Lentil Tacos with Honey Lime Slaw

Chef Mike Bacha
Emory University Hospital, Atlanta

- 1 cup olive oil
- 8 cups cremini or other mushrooms, diced
- ¼ cup chili powder
- ¼ cup ground cumin
- 1 cup onions, finely diced
- ½ cup garlic, minced
- 4 cups brown lentils
- 6 cups water
- 1 cup toasted walnuts, minced
- 1 cup sun-dried tomatoes, minced
- ¼ cup nutritional yeast
- 2½ tablespoons kosher salt
- 1 cup lime juice
- ¼ cup honey
- 12 cups cabbage, shredded
- 4 large carrots, cut into matchsticks
- 4 medium cucumbers, cut into matchsticks
- 6-inch corn tortillas, as needed
- 1 cup cilantro leaves

Heat olive oil over med-high heat and saute mushrooms, 3 to 4 minutes. Add chili powder and cumin, stirring constantly, about 1 minute. Add onions and garlic and saute until translucent. Add lentils and water; simmer 30 to 40 minutes until cooked but still holding together. Stir in walnuts, sun-dried tomatoes, yeast and salt.

Make slaw by combining lime juice and honey together, then stir in cabbage, carrot and cucumber.

Fill each tortilla with about 3 tablespoons of taco filling, then top with prepared slaw and garnish with cilantro. Makes 10 tacos.



Served at Emory Hospital in Atlanta, ingredients like walnuts, lentils, mushrooms and nutritional yeast in this taco with honey-lime slaw all fortify the gut biome.

BOOZE-FREE BONANZA

12 Steps to a profitable NA program

By Laura Yee
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda

Restaurants that want a solid nonalcoholic beverage program have plenty to choose from, including NA beer, spirits, wine, sparklers and premixed cocktails.

Dry January, the sober-curious movement, the drop in alcohol consumption for health reasons—especially among younger adults—and the tidal wave of low- and no-alcohol beverages all lead to one must-do: turn the trend into revenue.

Bemoaning the change in booze consumption, restaurateurs say, is shortsighted. No one is suggesting upselling cloyingly sweet kiddie cocktails, but fresh juices with the acidic tang and health benefits of fermented ingredients or spiked with botanical nonalcoholic spirits can fetch far more than a lemonade. Additionally, the number of bottled and canned booze-free beers and cocktails has grown exponentially. Even wines and sparklers rival their quaffable counterparts.

A little effort—more than just saying, “Our bartender can make you a virgin Paloma or any drink without the alcohol”—can have a noteworthy impact on the bottom line. Advice from bartenders, restaurateurs and sommeliers helped compile the 12 steps to dive into the profitable NA world.

1. USE THE RIGHT LANGUAGE

Refrain from calling drinks “mocktails,” which is inaccurate and fails to convey the complexity of no-booze drinks. The industry term is nonalcoholic drinks or simply NA.

2. EDUCATE YOURSELF AND STAFF

From business trade articles to cookbooks, there’s plenty of information on creating NA drinks. Attributes of canned cocktails and NA beers are less prevalent, which means tasting by trial and error—or asking colleagues with robust NA programs. Tasting, however, could be a fun way to get buy-in from staff, who need to know details about the drinks to sell them—just like the food.

3. THINK OF UP CHARGES

Offering another component to the drink and charging more for it can be a way to increase profits or make the cocktail even more appealing, whether it’s a shot of energy or a small bite (see steps #10 and #11).





4. GIVE NA REAL ESTATE

Is it possible to successfully sell a menu item that's not listed? Don't make diners ask—list the drinks and describe them like cocktails so diners have a frame of reference. Nixta Taqueria in Austin, Texas, uses the menu to highlight and describe NA drinks with language that matches the fun and casual vibe.

5. MATCH THE CONCEPT

While mash-up concepts mean anything goes for food and beverage, it still makes sense to start with drinks inherent in the cuisine. At Chicago's Galit, the food and NA drinks take their cues from Middle Eastern fare. The restaurant offers two flavors of *gazoz*—seasonal sodas with fresh herbs. With a dedicated spot on the menu, the pomegranate soda features hibiscus, cardamom and rose while the Iranian drink *sekanjabin* includes a honey shrub with fennel seed and mint. Both are \$10.

6. OFFER VARIETY

When labor is a consistent challenge, an NA menu of only hand-crafted drinks may not be the most margin-savvy way to go. A selection of canned or bottled NA drinks—beers, cocktails and sparklers—can help.

7. GO FOR UNIQUE

Published four years ago, "Zero" by Grant Achatz still reigns as the definitive book on NA drinks. The creative and original approach comes from The Alinea Group restaurants based in Chicago, most

notably Achatz's Alinea and cocktail lounge The Aviary. The recipes range from simple to complex and provide a springboard to create nonalcoholic drinks exclusive to your restaurant.

8. TAKE A CUE FROM WINE LISTS

Describe the attributes of drinks (fruity, bright, savory, herbaceous), but also think of how wine lists discuss varietals. For example, Leitz-Eins Zwei Zero Sparkling Rose, which D&M Wines and Liquors make from 100% pinot noir grapes and then removes the alcohol, is described as "nicely balanced by the bubbles" along with scents of strawberry, red apple and clementine. For NA beer, it's best to describe the attributes that closely resemble its counterpart with alcohol, such as malty or hoppy.

9. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Boomers—or those older than 60—still imbibe like it's 1999. Younger diners, specifically Gen Z, drink alcohol the least often—a trend that's growing. If your customers skew older, a few NA beverages may do the trick, but if tapping a younger crowd is a goal, an NA program is a must.

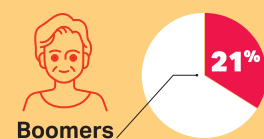
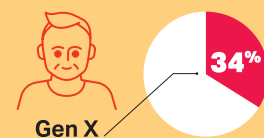
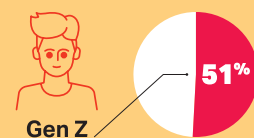
10. WORK IN WELLNESS

Eighty percent of consumers want at least one specific health benefit from an NA drink, according to food research firm Datassential. Think green tea, fruits high in antioxidants, protein powders and fermented produce.

"Consumer preferences have changed, and with that, so do we. It's just good business to listen to our guest's preferences. Offering appealing and innovative NA cocktails is an integral part of our bar program."

—Jake Zubrod, director of restaurants for The Broadmoor and certified sommelier

WHO LOOKS FORWARD TO LTO NA DRINKS



Source: Datassential

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF GALIT



11. MAKE IT PRETTY

Colorful presentations—the drink itself or its garnishes—turn heads, stir curiosity and can create a brand. Freeze fresh-squeezed fruits and vegetables into cubes to add colorful drama to light-hued drinks. At The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Colorado, colorful honey fruit gummies garnish the NA French Bloom sparkler and other housemade cocktails.

12. MAKE IT SEASONAL/LIMITED TIME ONLY

Seasonal drinks, particularly in the summer, have a big audience because they naturally offer FOMO—they come as fast as they go. Watermelon, blueberries, peaches and melons are solid starting points. On-trend flavors such as yuzu, guava, dragon fruit, passion fruit and mango cross beverage categories, from beer and lemonade to smoothies and energy drinks, providing plenty of ways to fill an NA lineup anytime. If you're still unsure whether NA is a route worth traveling, offer a theme night or LTO to start but remember the 12 steps.

"Consumer preferences have changed, and with that, so do we," says Jake Zubrod, the director of restaurants for The Broadmoor and certified sommelier. "It's just good business to listen to our guest's preferences. Offering appealing and innovative NA cocktails is an integral part of our bar program." ■

TREND TRACKER

ON THE RADAR



Sea Oil.

With Eleven Madison Park's Daniel Humm at the culinary helm, Algae Cooking Club is offering an anti-inflammatory and more sustainable cooking oil with a 535 F smoke point. It's high in omega-9 fats and has a lower carbon footprint than vegetable or olive oil.



PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF NATURE'S FYND

Get Your Fungi On.

Nature's Fynd microbe-based fungi protein called Fy is a versatile substitute for meat and dairy products, a complete protein with all nine essential amino acids that can be grown in just a few days. Le Bernardin's Eric Ripert is using it on the menu, and Fy yogurt, cream cheese and breakfast patties are already in grocery stores.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY LIKENESS STUDIO

A Room With A Restaurant.

From Gjelina Group's Vitoria in Venice, California, to Harry's Guest House in Seattle's Capitol Hill, restaurant groups are expanding their hospitality reach with boutique bed and breakfast concepts in their hometowns.



Banger Starving Student Food.

Make-your-own ramen pit stops are speeding into the U.S. In these small restaurant storefronts spotted in Los Angeles (Slurp & Sip) and New York (Instant Noodle Factory), you pick your dried ramen brick and cook it yourself with the option of adding ingredients such as an egg, corn, white rice, scallions, cilantro, lime and sliced onions.

HIGH ALERT



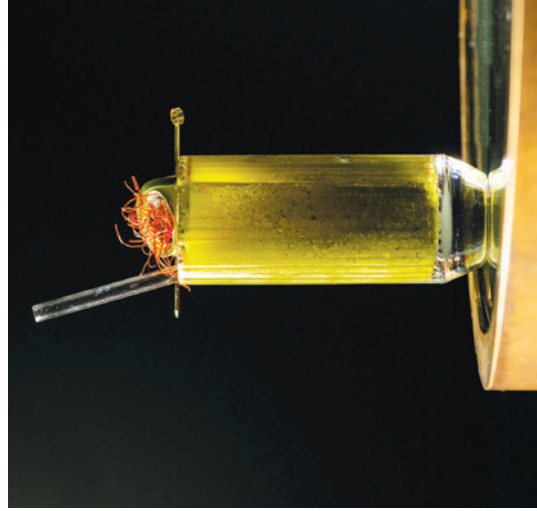
Automatic Aperitivo.

Adding value to a meal can take just about any form. Diners are offered complimentary prosecco, olives, prosciutto, chips and Parmesan straight from a fresh cracked wheel while waiting to be seated at Il Vigneto at CordeValle, in San Martin, California.



Bucking The Wheat.

Naturally gluten-free, with an earthy nutty flavor, buckwheat is infiltrating menus, from the likes of Japanese soba noodles to French crepes and baked goods, including buckwheat pancakes at Argot French brasserie in Chicago.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY STAN LEE

Hold the Booze Lounges.

From Stay, Los Angeles' first zero-proof cocktail lounge, where drinks are inspired by Chinese zodiac signs, to Milwaukee's Agency, a hybrid bar where each drink comes in an alcoholic and non-alcoholic version, nonalcoholic drinks are worthy of their own space. See page 40 on how to offer profitable NA drinks.

FADING OUT



Half-Hearted Happy Hour.

A boring happy hour with discounted drinks nobody wants is not attracting any new diners. **Try this instead:** Basque-inspired steakhouse Asador Bastian collaborates with food and drink purveyors for a monthly happy hour (usually Tuesdays) with complimentary Cinco Jotas Ibérico acorn-fed sliced ham.



Get A Better Steak.

A slab of cauliflower, or any vegetable, is not steak unless it's seasoned well and paired with complementary components.

Try this instead: Broccoli is cauliflower's verdant cousin, and chefs are playing up its crunchy texture with an array of flavors. See page 22 for more.



Sad Stadium Food.

Sports fans are becoming more sophisticated and craving more than hot dogs and nachos.

Try this instead: Pacers Sports & Entertainment recently opened Commission Row, a 30,000 square-foot dining and entertainment space in Indianapolis in partnership with Cunningham Restaurant Group that includes a street-level chophouse and seafood restaurant, plus a basement-level speakeasy.



Sleepy Afternoon Tea.

This holiday tradition needs a wakeup call.

Try this instead: Santa Monica Proper debuted a wellness-inspired afternoon tea with a lighter California touch while highlighting local farms with beetroot tartlets dusted with pistachio powder and strawberry chamomile scones with farmer's market jam.

Drop The Cookie.

Forget scooping cookie dough onto sheet trays for the iconic drop cookie. The more sophisticated, thick, puck-like cookie baked in a mold is showing up in New York, from Petit Chou to Supermoon Bakehouse.



Plant-based meat sauced with global barbecue flavors such as Thai, Mexican or Korean and paired with vegan cheese extends its appeal.

BUN AND DONE

BARBECUE SANDWICHES FOR THE WIN

WITH ALL THE HYPE AROUND BURGERS AND CHICKEN SANDWICHES, IT'S EASY TO LOSE SIGHT OF BARBECUE.

Behind the scenes, barbecue is expanding beyond its traditional American roots and providing seemingly endless possibilities for chicken, pork, brisket and plant-based choices to fill the bun.

“As barbecue moves into its latest phase (first came regional American barbecue, then regional American barbecue outside the regions where it originated) in the coming year, we’ll see more ethnic-meets-American barbecue,” says Steven Raichlen, longtime barbecue and grilling expert, cookbook author and TV host, in his 2024 trend report.

GOING GLOBAL

The evolution provides opportunities for all restaurants to expand their menu mix. According to food research firm Datassential, 88% of consumers love or like sandwiches, which positions barbecue hand-held options as a more affordable diner choice and a way to balance increasing food costs.

At Hurtado Barbecue, Brandon Hurtado calls a blend of his Mexican heritage with Texas barbecue “Mexicue,” which he applies to the classic meats, from brisket and pulled pork to spareribs and smoked chicken, at locations in Arlington and Fort Worth, Texas. His chopped sandwich combo highlights slow-cooked chopped brisket and sauce on a brioche bun and includes side dishes such as Mexican street corn, Mexican rice and crunchy kale salad.

Texas barbecue also influences Loro, where “the Far East meets down South” for Chefs Aaron Franklin and Tyson Cole. The Asian smokehouse and bar, which opened in 2018, has locations in Austin, Dallas and Houston with more to come.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN T. MCGILL



A Thai dish from Curry Boys Barbecue.

TAKE A 'CUE

Not all evolving barbecue is reflected on sandwiches—yet. Some ideas that could end up landing on a soft roll:

- Smoky barbecued chicken in traditional Thai yellow curry
Curry Boys Barbecue, San Antonio, Texas
- Korean barbecue short rib taco with salsa roja, cilantro-onion relish and chili soy slaw
Kogi BBQ, Los Angeles
- Shredded beef with African spices, lime, cilantro, bell peppers, onion and garlic with housemade red sauce over basmati rice or couscous
Afro, St. Paul, Minnesota

Soft and pillowy buns, such as Hilltop Hearth, can carry any type of barbecue.



Along with Loro’s sake-twist on beer-can chicken, there’s oak-smoked brisket topped with papaya salad, peanuts, chili aioli and Thai herbs on a brioche-like bun.

In Seattle, barbecue sandwiches take on a Hawaiian twist at Marination. Shredded kalua pork is served on soft Hawaiian rolls with slaw and “nunya” sauce, which the concept interprets as “nunya-business” but admits it includes mayonnaise, gochujang, garlic, green onions and other spices.

Korean-inspired southern barbecue is the ticket at Heirloom Market BBQ, helmed by Chefs Cody Taylor and Jiyeon Lee in an Atlanta roadside diner. Using gochujang on all their barbecue, the chefs are known for the 72-hour kalbi beef with banchan but also their selection of sandwiches that get equal love. Whether the sandwich on a soft toasted bun showcases the 12-hour smoked brisket, the pulled chicken or diced pork, diners can choose sauces such as Korean sweet heat, classic mild, spicy fresh or peppery vinegar. The spicy diced pork sandwich is topped with kimchi slaw and cucumber kimchi and served with Korean barbecue sauce on the side.



Global spices and sauces are merging with traditional American barbecue, including pulled pork sandwiches.

“AS BARBECUE MOVES INTO ITS LATEST PHASE (FIRST CAME REGIONAL AMERICAN BARBECUE, THEN REGIONAL AMERICAN BARBECUE OUTSIDE THE REGIONS WHERE IT ORIGINATED) IN THE COMING YEAR, WE’LL SEE MORE ETHNIC-MEETS-AMERICAN BARBECUE.”

—Steven Raichlen, longtime barbecue and grilling expert, cookbook author and TV host

At Buck Tui BBQ in Overland Park, Kansas, Executive Chef and Pit Master Ted Liberda is showcasing barbecue through the lens of his Thai background and his Midwestern upbringing.

He uses palm sugar, Thai spices and Thai smoking methods to make flame-fired meats paired with bold spicy sauces (think Thai chilies and umami-packed fish sauce). On sandwiches, texture from different meats and bold accompaniments deliver big and balanced flavors. They include the X Man with brisket, heavenly pork, Thai sausage, pickle, papaya slaw and his signature creamy tiger cry

sauce and The Moo Noi “Little Piggy,” which combines pork belly, heavenly pork, potato chips, arugula and chili-jam vinaigrette. The Thai-Merican Brisket sandwich features smoked brisket, papaya slaw, provolone, barbecue sauce and creamy tiger cry sauce.

OTHER PARTS

Burnt ends—the point section on smoked brisket that browns and caramelizes faster—are finding their way into sandwiches. According to Datassential, burnt ends are an “on-fire trend” and poised to grow 42% by 2026. Sweet Cheeks Q in Boston includes burnt ends in the Big Papi sandwich, which also includes pulled pork, barbecue sauce, house hot link sliced brisket, smoked jalapeno cream cheese, pickles, crispy onions and pickled jalapenos on a griddled roll. Burnt ends also star in a sandwich at Andy Husbands’ The Smoke Shop BBQ, which has six locations in the Boston area. For an upcharge, burnt ends can be added to the fries—crinkle-cut style topped with cheese sauce, pit beans, pickled jalapenos and scallions.

HOLD THE MEAT

Pit masters might decry the notion of plant-based meat in a barbecue sandwich, but the option can prevent the veto vote among diners. At Pure Grit BBQ in New York City, smoked, pulled and roasted jackfruit is served with fried onions, pickles and barbecue sauce on a gluten-free bun.

Meatless options are also on the menu at Brothers BBQ in Denver. Tofu served on a soft roll is flash-fried, finished on the grill and brushed with the restaurant’s signature sauce.

To save on labor but with the same attention to detail, a plant-based option that just requires sauteing with tomato and onions works for Soul & Smoke in Chicago. Its Vegan Sloppy Joe piles the ingredient onto a soft bun with vegan cheese and pickles. Customers can choose a sauce, such as tangy, Carolina gold, jerk and Cajun barbecue. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEAN T. MCGILL

On a Roll



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BE

Standout hospital food is real—
and everyone can learn from it

BETTER

By Heather Sennett
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda



➔ Poached salmon with white wine, vegetable nage and petite baby vegetables is served at Northwell Health in New York, not a fine dining restaurant.



“We’re bringing the hospitality industry into the hospital. I do not treat it differently than I would my restaurant.”

— Bruno Tison, vice president of food services for Northwell Health

Bruno Tison started his culinary career at a Michelin-starred establishment in France before becoming the youngest executive chef in the history of New York City’s famed Plaza Hotel.

After a career in high-end restaurants and hotels, he pivoted to an area of foodservice that’s largely the butt of jokes. In 2017, Tison became the executive chef of Northwell Health, the largest health system in New York.

“It was a long journey, as you can imagine,” Tison, now vice president of Northwell’s food services, says. “Most healthcare systems in the United States do not consider food and nutrition as an asset. They look at it as a cost, almost an obligation.”

Tison decided to reimagine hospital food as a successful restaurant, with meals made by skilled workers, using quality ingredients and focusing on food as a key factor in emotional and physical wellness.

He’s among an increasingly vocal crew of chefs, many with restaurant and hotel backgrounds, working for healthcare systems around the country to transform hospital food into more than a punchline. They might even have tips to share with restaurant chefs.

Serve meals with care

“We’re bringing the hospitality industry into the hospital,” Tison says. “I do not treat it differently than I would my restaurant.” That means using small, local producers and focusing on order accuracy. When he started, Tison says, the hospitals didn’t serve pork because there were concerns about serving it accidentally to someone whose religion forbade the protein. “We needed to correct our ordering process and not make mistakes,” he says. Too often, patients would complain about cold food, late meals and incorrect orders. “This is what we needed to fix.”

Stop relying on the freezer

When Tison joined Northwell, freezers made up 90% of the refrigerated space in kitchens. Now, they’ve almost all been converted to refrigerators for storing fresh produce and other ingredients. “Our freezer is almost empty,” he says. Stock, soup and other housemade items are the only ingredients stored in the freezer.

Save room for treats

Even (and maybe especially) folks who are hospitalized deserve a tasty post-meal treat. At one time, Northwell served only pre-packaged, frozen and not nutritionally sound desserts. Tison started collaborating with a local pastry shop to develop desserts that fit within the nutritional guidelines for patients. About a year ago, he hired Northwell’s first pastry chef to create desserts in-house. “We put beautiful small desserts on the tray of every patient who’s not on a restricted diet,” Tison says.



Serving dessert for hospital patients who aren't on restrictive diets can be mentally and physically healthy.



Bing Cherry Clafoutis with Matcha & Honey Yogurt Sauce, Pistachio Tuile

Regional Executive Chef Andrew Cain
Northern Westchester and Phelps hospitals,
Tarrytown, New York

120 grams eggs
60 grams egg yolks
100 grams sugar
70 grams almond flour
10 grams flour
250 grams skim milk
10 grams kirsch
3 pounds cherries, pitted and halved

600 grams Greek yogurt
40 grams honey
10 grams matcha green tea powder
Water, as needed, about 60 grams
Curly tuiles, recipe follows
Sweetened whipped cream

Combine eggs, yolks and sugar and mix in flours, milk and kirsch.

Arrange cherries in greased silicone molds and pour in batter.

Bake at 350 F until the clafoutis are set and an inserted toothpick comes out clean.

Combine yogurt and honey and whisk in matcha. Thin with water to desired sauce-like consistency.

To plate, place clafoutis on the center of a plate and spoon sauce to the left of the clafoutis. Add small quenelle of whipped cream and curly tuile.

To make curly tuiles: Whip together 150 grams sugar with 120 grams egg whites. Fold in 113 grams softened unsalted butter. Mix in 64 grams flour and 4 grams vanilla extract and a pinch of kosher salt. Transfer to a piping bag with a small plain tip. Pipe batter in straight 5-inch lines approximately 1/4-inch wide and bake in a preheated 350 F oven until just golden. Working quickly, use a knife steel to curl.



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Penne with pea pesto and roasted tomato is an example of the healthy and flavorful foods served at NYC Health + Hospitals. Scan the code for the recipe.

Educate your diners

Earlier this year, Emory Healthcare embarked on a monthlong test of a plant-based menu. Items included vegan nachos and chickpea cauliflower masala. Diners would scan a QR code to learn more about what they were eating, as well as find resources on plant-based eating and take a survey about their meal. “We had a blog that also has some good education, with lots of quotes from our physician partners as well,” says Kip Hardy, manager of Food Service Projects at Emory Healthcare in

Decatur, Georgia. “We have changed a lot. The idea of a plant-based menu in our cafe even five years ago—oh my gosh, we’re going to get the torches and pitchforks!”

Find like-minded partners

Emory Healthcare has worked with Common Market, which sources produce from local farmers, for years, says Mike Bacha, Emory’s assistant director of culinary. “We purchase local lettuce from a hydroponic farm in South Georgia. I buy the chopped collard greens,

apples, blueberries, you name it, whatever is in season ... Some things are still priced a little bit out of our range, but, over the years, I’ve been able to work a lot of good partnerships and get to know some of the farmers.” Unlike restaurants where business fluctuates, hospital volumes don’t change much. That helps Bacha make buying commitments to area produce suppliers, he says.

Get creative with flavor

Phil DeMaiolo, executive chef for inpatient meals with NYC Health + Hospitals, came to hospital foodservice in 2020 after a career in hotel dining. To DeMaiolo, hospital food can still be flavorful while following necessary nutritional guidelines—you just have to get creative. “We really looked at cooking processes, flavoring profiles and cooking methods that bring more flavor to the dish. A lot of natural ingredients contain sodium, so you don’t necessarily have to season everything with salt. But you can use things like herbs, aromatics.”

Know your audience

Hospital food, like food served in restaurants, must be rooted in the people it serves. You wouldn’t open a high-end steakhouse in a community that couldn’t support it, DeMaiolo says. “In a hospital, you have to know who you’re feeding, what the cultures are and really focus on the comfort food of those cultures,” he says. “Sometimes, we tend to create dishes that we feel are right for us. It’s not about us. It’s about our clients, our patients. It’s about the people that we serve ... Train your staff to understand why we’re doing this and incorporate them into the decision-making because, normally, your staff lives in the community, they are part of the culture.”

For Northwell’s Tison, his revamped foodservice program has hit just one major snag:

“Now, the problem is that people do not want to leave,” he says. “They ask, ‘At what time is lunch served? I’m going to be released at 11:30.’ But we can do lunch or dinner to-go so we can free the bed.” ■

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THE
HIGHWIRE
ACT OF

PORTION CONTROL

It requires a lot of juggling. Here's how

By Heather Sennett
Photography by Matt Armendariz
Food styling by Adam Pearson
Prop styling by Amy Paliwoda



Adjusting portions of a dish like pozole and the size of plateware can help control costs and reduce food waste. But prices might also need to change slightly.

Restaurant veteran Fernando Yuriar remembers when portions were “ridiculous.” Breakfast plates loaded with hash browns, pancakes, eggs, bacon and sausage; massive burgers that looked more like an Instagram stunt than an actual meal; overfilled plates that few people could finish.

Yuriar, executive chef at Relish Burger Bar in El Dorado Hills, California, sees less of that these days for a variety of reasons.

“A lot of people are just more health-conscious nowadays,” says Yuriar, who’s been in the business for a few decades. “Everyone steers toward the healthier options.”

For restaurants, it’s a high-wire act, a delicate balance of weighing food costs with

appropriate portions in a menu mix that delivers value to diners.

And it’s a calculus that has become trickier with significant food inflation (prices for dining out remained more than 5% higher at the start of 2024 compared to a year ago, while grocery prices were up just more than 1%), soaring restaurant labor costs and the prevalence of specialty diets among consumers.

“We were always taught, ‘Get more bang for your buck,’” he says. “(If I’m going to pay \$11 for this chicken Caesar, it needs to be a mountain. And I kid you not when I tell you that our portion sizes were that big up until last year. We changed the menu this year.”

Craft perfect portions

Relish Burger Bar recently shrunk menu items—a salad and a quesadilla—to make the portions more customer-friendly. Too much lettuce returned to the kitchen uneaten, so Yuriar bumped up the salad toppings and reduced the greenery while still maintaining appropriate food costs.

And the quesadilla went from a “monstrous” 14-inch flour tortilla to two four-inch corn tortillas on a seven-inch plate instead of an 11-inch plate. The restaurant dropped the price by \$1, too.

“How many places open up and close so fast?” Yuriar says. “Because the people feel cheated.”



Whole fish like branzino with accompaniments can be pitched as a lighter entree for one or a part of several mains to share.

Put kitchen tools to work

Tyler Lovejoy is the CFO and operations manager of The Station Public House, which opened in Auburn, California, in February 2020—just before the pandemic. “It made us stronger as a company,” Lovejoy says, by dealing with labor and food costs like never before.

The back of house is religious in its use of kitchen tools to measure ingredients and finished dishes, he says. A 4-ounce ladle for dipping sauces. A stainless-steel mixing bowl to portion fries. “It is challenging, especially when you get a new person and you’re kind of thrown into the kitchen,” he admits. “Our main chef oversees all that to make sure everyone is being trained and cross-trained, whether it be slicing or making recipes, making sure the right measurements are used.”

Master the upgrade

At Bar Under the Sun in Corpus Christi, Texas, the menu is tailored to a variety of meal occasions, from hearty dinners to a beer and a snack. Those looking for a heftier portion can spring for upgrades, such as adding bacon to a burger, says Jackson Hayes, executive chef. There’s no front-of-house staff in the traditional sense, but the cooks are trained to recommend dishes based on dining occasions. “So, we can sort of steer them, depending on what they’re looking at when they come to the window and chat with us personally,” Hayes says.

Develop a cost-friendly (and filling) signature item

Bar Under the Sun is known for its Potato Cracklins. Large russet potatoes are hollowed out, like canoes, before they’re chopped and frozen. “Then they’re ready to fry,” Hayes says. “It’s not quite a potato wedge, not quite a chip. It’s kind of its own thing. And it takes the labor away from rinsing and blanching french fries.” The potato innards become empanada filling. And the cracklins can turn any sandwich into a substantial meal.



Using tools for exact measurements and weighing ingredients can help with portion control.



30-SECOND SYNOPSIS OF PORTION CONTROL

If your customers and your bottom line want healthier portions, try these methods from longtime chefs.

- Reduce the overall size of a portion, such as lettuce in a salad, but make up for loss of perceived value by adding other items.
- Menu a basic sandwich, burger, salad or pasta, but offer healthier add-ons for an additional cost.
- Watch what gets thrown out—too much of any ingredient means it’s too much food.
- Use measuring tools for exact amounts to control costs.
- Preportion ingredients.
- Create a low-cost signature item and portion it as a shareable dish. It can be indulgent, which diners view as a treat, when ordering a healthier food such as a salad or a simply prepared fish.

Preportioning pays off

It’s worth spending some labor dollars on portioning items in advance, Yuriar says. At Relish Burger Bar, a prep cook dedicates a couple of days a week to breaking down frozen items, such as tater tots and fried pickles, into appetizer-sized portions. “It’s one of those days they dread because it’s just tedious,” he says, but it’s a chore that pays off during crunch times.

Consider the weather

It gets hot in South Texas, which Bar Under the Sun considers when planning its menu, Hayes says. “Maybe not everything is making a run through the fryer, maybe some lighter dishes,” he says. So the menu includes items like seared ahi tuna tostadas, served with guacamole, a cabbage-collard greens slaw and everything bagel salsa macha. “It’s a beautiful-looking dish,” he says. “And it’s a little bit fresher for those days when you don’t want anything deep-fried and a gut bomb for you.” The tuna is sliced thin after searing, with each portion weighed on a scale. “It’s good for sharing, and it’s a good hearty snack for one person,” he says. “But, since there’s two, you can share it. Tuna is a little bit pricey so we are watching portions and making sure that those are dialed in and hitting the right ounces.” ■



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A 320-square-foot vertical hydroponic farm provides organic greens for Vital Root in Denver.

CHECK IN: SAVE AND SUSTAIN

Why contributing to a healthier planet is still good for business

By Bret Thorn

TOP PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF EDIBLE BEATS

TOP PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF EDIBLE BEATS. BOTTOM PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSEY ALEXANDER

SUSTAINABILITY

is a big deal to Americans, who during the past decade have shown growing interest in food waste and climate change. In fact, market research firm Ipsos reports that 75% of consumers consider sustainability when shopping—and that includes shopping in restaurants.

Foodservice, which generates more than 11 million tons of waste annually, according to various organizations, has made significant strides. Knowing that every dollar invested in food-waste reduction can realize \$8 in cost savings has been a motivating factor, but challenges still exist. A check-in can help determine what more to do.

“If I were starting today, the first thing that I would do would be to pick a few areas in which to concentrate,” says Maisie Ganzler, author of “You Can’t Market Manure at Lunchtime: And Other Lessons from the Food Industry for Creating a More Sustainable Company.”

Break it down

Ganzler, former chief strategy and brand officer of Bon Appétit Management Company, an onsite foodservice provider known for its sustainability initiatives, advises organizing sustainability into three categories: sourcing, operations and disposal. For sourcing, she says to focus on areas including local, sustainable seafood and antibiotic reduction.

Working with local farmers and artisanal producers of items such as honey and cheese helps reinforce community bonds, which customers often appreciate, and it can reduce transportation costs and greenhouse gas emissions, depending on how the food is produced.

“Every dollar that we spend in restaurant sourcing is sending two messages: It’s sending



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Vital Root’s hydroponic farm grows microgreens using less water.

a message to the producer that this is the type of product you should be creating because it’s what you’re going to be able to sell, and it sends a message to your customer that this is what you want to serve them,” she says.

One should consider well-managed fisheries, says Ganzler, who is partial to oysters, which are nutritious, contribute minimal carbon emissions and restore waterways.

For operations, she says, it’s important to think about energy use like turning on equipment only when needed and checking equipment to determine whether it’s up-to-date and efficient. New products that use less energy are coming onstream all the time.

Operators should also consider water usage: Why run water over frozen ingredients to defrost them when you can move them to the walk-in? For food waste, Ganzler says to weigh it. Software can help measure, but Ganzler says instructing cooks to place waste in a storage container and then discussing it at the end of a shift can help illustrate the issue. Intelligent



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Greens from the hydroponic farm are featured in this Cobb salad and other dishes at Vital Root’s six locations.

menu design can help reduce waste too, she says. Examples include using beet greens and stems as well as the roots, and for vegetables in general, “what you cut up for salad one day can be made into soup the next day.”

To further reduce waste, you can donate food at the end of a shift to avoid spoilage if your operation will be closed for the next few days. That same food can also be donated to animal feed lots.

Can you invest in a healthier planet?

Taco Bell franchisee Cotti Foods Corporation in February installed three solar canopies at its restaurant in Tulare, California—two over the drive-thru and one over the parking lot—after previously installing solar canopies in nearby Delano. The company estimated that the new panels would save more than \$700,000 during their lifespan.

“The continued increase in utility costs and energy demands all over the state have



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Solar canopies at Taco Bell in Tulare, California, are expected to save more than \$700,000.

prompted Cotti to explore multiple programs aimed at helping our restaurants offset these expenses,” Cotti Foods Chief Development Officer Ryan Zacche said in a statement announcing the investment, adding that the new panels would generate half of the restaurant’s power.

Justin Cucci of Edible Beats, which operates six restaurants in Denver, installed a 320-square-foot vertical hydroponic farm at his restaurant Vital Root, providing the restaurant with heirloom kale, arugula, tatsoi, mustard greens and more while using 99% less water than traditional farms.

Audit the menu

Chefs know sourcing ingredients from earth-friendly purveyors contributes to a greener planet. But conditions change, so it’s always worth another look. Merriman’s, a four-unit restaurant group in Hawaii, has debuted a low-methane goat cheese at its flagship location in Waimea on the Big Island in partnership with Blue Ocean Barns and Hawaii Island Goat Dairy. The dairy feeds goats a special type of limu kohu

seaweed that Merriman’s says reduces their methane emissions by 85%. The restaurant also has worked with sustainability platform Greenplaces to measure the carbon footprint of each of its dishes.

The restaurant group also switched 25% of its wine bottles to those weighing 3 pounds or less, saving energy in shipping.

Are efforts worthwhile?

Not all packaging works in every market. With no composting program, such products will end up in landfills. Or various states have regulations such as forbidding products like added PFAS, a class of “forever chemicals” that never degrade and can be harmful to health.

“Some of it may be front-end signaling to the customer that they’re responsible and care, but the follow-through is the toughest thing in this whole market,” says Jamil Bouchareb, founder and CEO of Restaurantware, which specializes in eco-friendly packaging and other materials. To help with the better recycling efforts, Bouchareb is working on technology initiatives to screen products that aren’t allowed for composting in a customer’s specific market. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY INTEGRATE SOLAR



Consumers who consider sustainability when shopping, including shopping in restaurants

Source: Ipsos

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Bringing Calm to the Plate

The smart way to deal with health information overload

By Abigail Covington



The key to winning over even the most judicious dieting diners, Brady Holmer says, is pairing something they might be wary of, like red meat, with healthy sides such as vegetables or microgreens.

Meeting the demands

of the consumer's ever-evolving dietary lifestyle can lead to menu madness: misinformation, unfocused offerings and unrealized profits.

Whether diners are undergoing a juice cleanse, losing weight with Ozempic, eschewing carbohydrates or choosing food to support a specific function, they all are striving to achieve common goals: living healthier physically and mentally. Instead of allowing the latest wellness craze to dictate the menu—or worse—losing customers who think you can't meet their dietary needs, take a strategic approach by debunking myths, offering flexibility and communicating which dishes support wellness.

Highlight the health benefits, not the calories

Don't make a big fuss about calories. Disclosing the nutritional details of dishes isn't an effective marketing or weight-loss strategy, says Brady Holmer, a diet expert at the leading health and nutrition research firm Examine. "There's very little evidence that listing calories on menus leads to better health outcomes," he says. "Obesity rates continue to skyrocket."

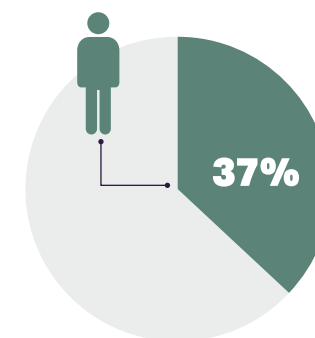
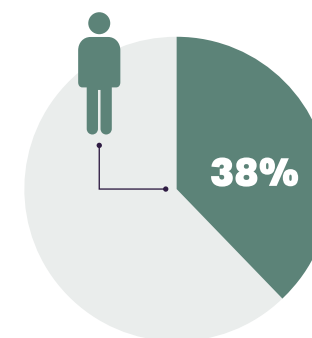
He suggests promoting the benefits of ingredients and preparation instead. If grass-fed butter accompanies bread, or salad dressing features extra-virgin olive oil, call it out on the menu. Health-conscious customers will gravitate toward that, Holmer says, over a stir-fry cooked in highly processed canola oil. Generally, knowledge is power when it comes to nutrition, and mentioning extra details like sourcing helps ease health-conscious customers' minds, says Holmer.

Honor customer cravings

People tend to frequent restaurants more for celebration and indulgence versus daily sustenance, despite prevailing wisdom to avoid or limit dining out to control weight and wellness. The temptation to order a rich dish that's challenging to make at home—health



All egg-white dishes may not be the best bet. Egg yolks contain some cholesterol and saturated fat, but they're also packed with important nutrients like choline, lutein and zeaxanthin that support eye and brain health.

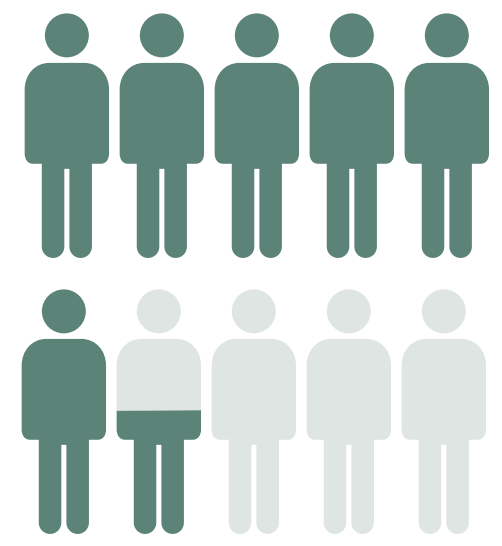


Consumers who anticipate eating more vegetables and fruits, respectively, during the next year, a growth trend from the previous year, making them again by far the top areas of growth

Source: Datassential




Sourdough has a famously tangy flavor and contains higher levels of vitamins and minerals than white bread.



75% Consumers who have experienced at least one health condition in the last five years

Source: Datassential

consequences be damned—is often too difficult to overcome. That’s why Holmer cautions chefs who want to honor their customers’ health goals against ignoring the impulse to indulge altogether. Consider red meat, which Holmer believes has been unfairly demonized.

Several studies have found a relationship between red meat consumption and cancer and diabetes, but there’s nothing that says the former causes the latter. Many of these studies, which rely on self-reported dietary data, also don’t account for what people are eating with the red meat, Holmer says. And, obviously, “getting a burger and fries five days per week,” says Holmer, isn’t the same as “following a keto diet that’s pretty clean and eating a steak twice a week.”

For most people, the occasional serving of red meat is a luxurious source of protein, which is why Holmer recommends keeping it on the menu. People “want to go somewhere where they know they are going to get a good piece of meat.” To win over even the most judicious dieting diners, pair something they might be wary of, like red meat, with healthy sides like broccoli

or microgreens, Holmer says. If the sides balance out the rest of the plate, health-minded customers can feel good about indulging.

Bet on balance

Holmer suggests taking a similar balanced approach toward other frequently misunderstood foods, such as carbs and egg yolks. In terms of the former, the answer isn’t no carbs, he says, but better carbs. Small tweaks, like the kind of bread for toast, can make a world of difference and don’t sacrifice flavor. Sourdough, for instance, has a famously tangy flavor and contains higher levels of vitamins and minerals than white bread, which will “raise your blood sugar really quickly,” says Holmer.

Egg yolks contain cholesterol and saturated fat, but they’re also packed with important nutrients like choline, lutein and zeaxanthin that support eye and brain health. An egg-white omelet has protein, Holmer says, “but you’re foregoing all of the other vitamins and minerals.” He suggests serving omelets with at least one full egg and describing it as “protein-packed.”

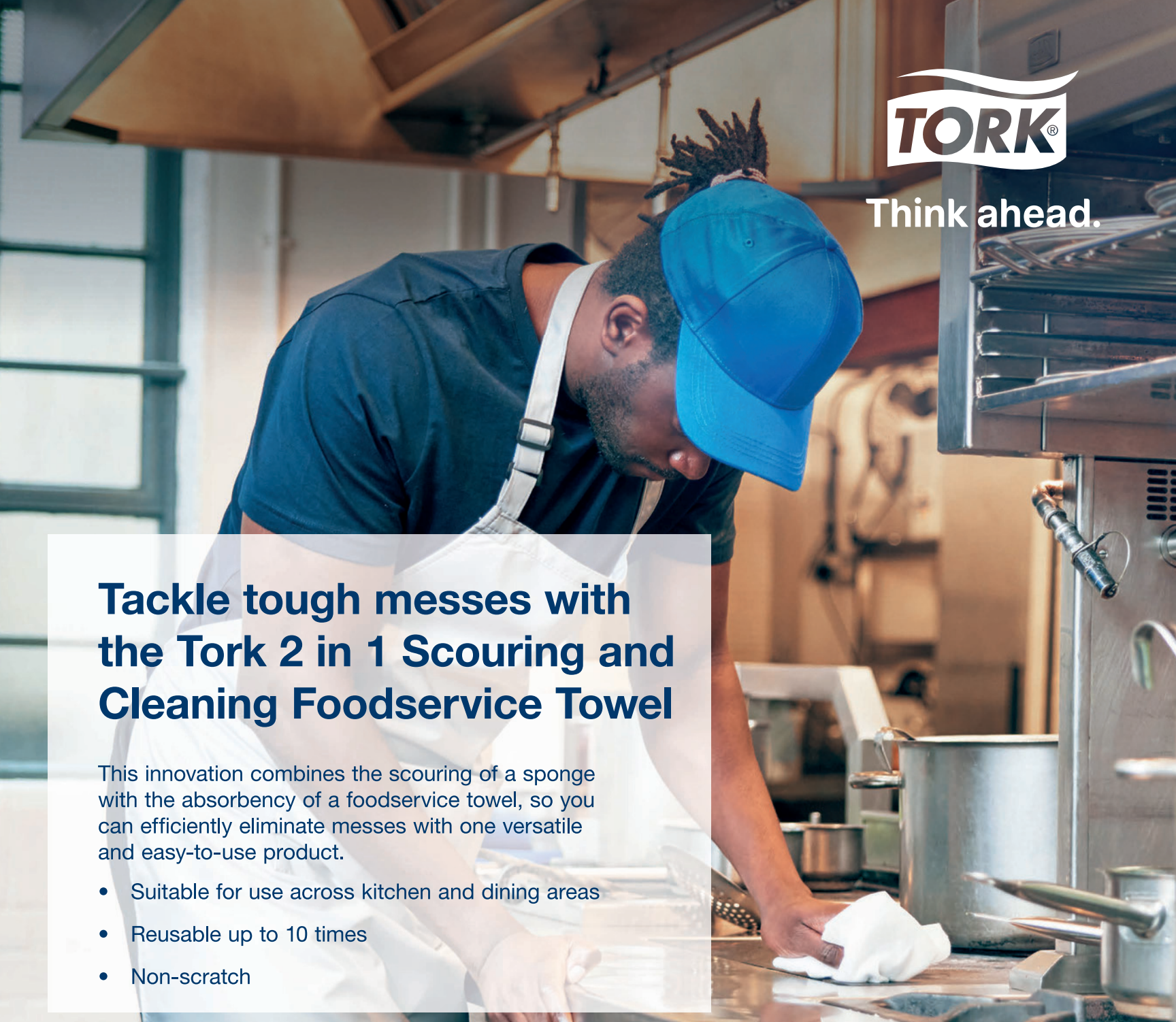
Educate, don’t isolate

As sound as Holmer’s suggestions may be, they won’t matter much if customers don’t perceive them that way. Someone who believes red meat causes cancer won’t likely order a steak, no matter the pairing. In that sense, the most difficult challenge a chef faces isn’t a diner’s restricted appetite. It’s misinformation.

To combat widespread health myths, communication and knowledgeable servers are essential. “If someone asks what the healthy option on the menu is, don’t isolate a single item,” Holmer says. “Ask them about their goals and steer them toward their desired outcomes.”

Informed servers are also essential to debunk myths surrounding food additives specific to restaurants, such as sourcing for farm-raised salmon and phosphate-treated shrimp. Restaurants should investigate claims of sustainability and share their findings with diners as a selling point.

“Anything can have a place in a well-balanced diet—especially if people are looking to go out and want to enjoy the dish that they’re having,” Holmer says. ■



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Well & Good

Managing mental health in restaurants

By Bret Thorn

The energy and adrenaline rush of kitchens and dining rooms are compelling parts of the restaurant industry, but the profession also means hard work and long hours, which can take their toll.

According to a 2021 study by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, 60% of servers at upscale restaurants have at least one mental health problem, such as depression or anxiety, and a 2023 survey by Cozymeal found that 70% of chefs who responded said they had experienced anxiety from working in restaurants. Substance abuse and sleeping disorders also remain high.

But the stress of COVID and related illnesses, loss of loved ones, job insecurity and general social ills that were compounded by it acted as a wakeup call for restaurants. Many operators no longer expect employees to just grin and bear hardships. Instead, they're listening to their workers' needs and offering help. But not all workplaces are accommodating, and there's always room for improvement. Here are some strategies to consider.

● Learn to recognize mental illness

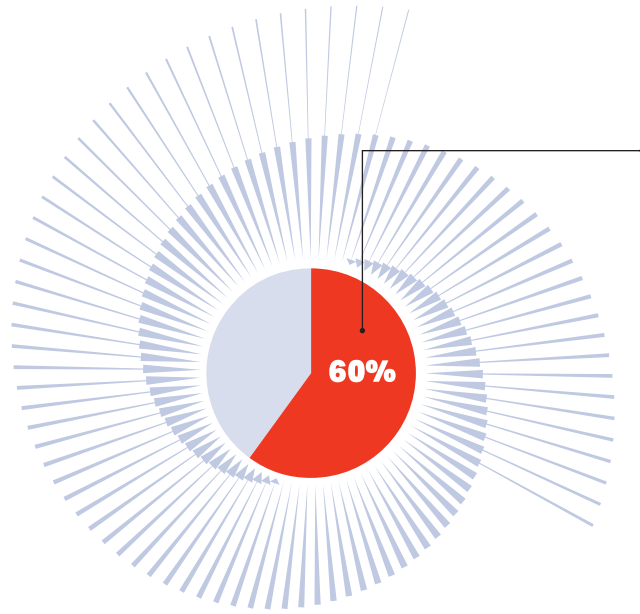
Many organizations offer courses to address and help recognize the warning signs of an unhealthy mental state. Take the time to educate yourself. Also make note of the national mental health hotline, 988, for people who have suicidal thoughts or deep depression.

● Destigmatize emotional challenges

Calling off from work has always been frowned upon in hospitality, especially when labor is tight, and employees don't want to lose shifts or disappoint co-workers. But sometimes people need a break—burnout is real. Hunter Evans, chef and owner of Elvie's in Jackson, Mississippi, offers workers a mental health day. He's also in favor of reimbursing for therapy or gym memberships.

● Check in with workers

"You sit down and give them the floor," says Sammie Flippen, an award-winning general manager at Noodles & Company. "It's super impactful and makes a huge difference, and you have a finger on the pulse of where they want to go, and you can help them with that journey." Making employees feel seen and heard can go a long way in boosting morale and discovering problems before they get out of control.



Servers at upscale restaurants that have at least one mental health problem, such as depression or anxiety

Source: National Center for Biotechnology Information

● **Set and enforce ground rules for behavior**

The days of pot-throwing chefs and bullying managers aren't over, but many successful operators have created environments of civility and respect as examples. In the front and back of the house, pay attention to signs of abusive behavior, whether physical or emotional, and establish and enforce a no-tolerance policy for it. Listen and act when employees express concern or anger at someone else's behavior.

● **Empower your employees**

Giving workers specific responsibilities suited to their interests can make a huge difference in morale and therefore their well-being. Check out "Unreasonable Hospitality" by Will Guidara, former co-owner of Eleven Madison Park in New York City, who writes about the transformative approach to inclusiveness among other methods for encouraging stellar service.

● **Take care of yourself**

Remember that managers, chefs and owners might also need someone to talk to, a good night's rest, time off, therapy or regular medical checkups. They cannot give staff or customers their best if they're not in good shape. By addressing their needs, they also set an example on the importance of well-being. ■



HELP IS ON THE WAY

During the past decade, many organizations have emerged to help workers cope with the unique challenges of the restaurant industry. Here's a start.

RESTAURANT AFTER HOURS
restaurantafterhours.org

Helps break down barriers to mental health and points those in need to available resources.

SOUTHERN SMOKE FOUNDATION
southernSmoke.org

Helps with healthcare costs for food and beverage workers and offers mental health services to restaurant workers and their children through a university affiliate program.

HEALTHY POUR
healthypour.org

Offers mental health training, coaching and other services.

I GOT YOUR BACK
igotyourback.info

Teaches warning signs of mental distress as well as personal self-awareness while providing access to resources in the Sacramento area, with a goal of expanding nationally.

GIVING KITCHEN
thegivingkitchen.org

Provides financial assistance and interpreter services in more than 180 languages and dialects to foodservice workers.

BEN'S FRIENDS
bensfriendshope.com

Offers support to those seeking or have found sobriety. Also hosts meetings in some 20 cities as well as daily online Zoom meetings and special meetups for workers' friends and families.

FOCUS ON HEALTH
fohealth.org

Develops no- and low-alcohol beverage programs and also offers courses in harm reduction, overdose prevention and response and conflict management.

SERVING THOSE SERVING
servingthoseserving.org

Promotes social, mental and physical wellness in the service industry through education, training and connecting people to resources.

CULINARY HOSPITALITY OUTREACH
chowco.org

Hosts weekly meetings, provides training in mental health, offers scripts for difficult conversations and offers a wellness workbook to help people who are struggling.



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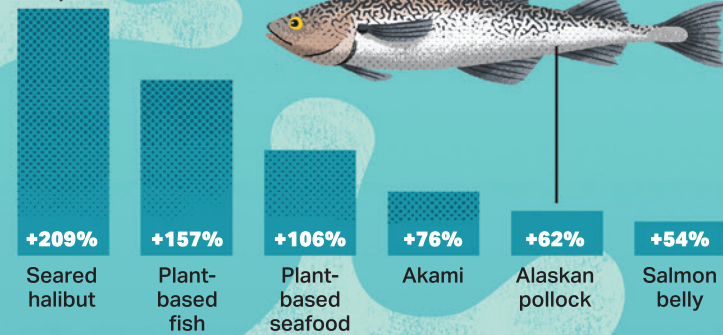
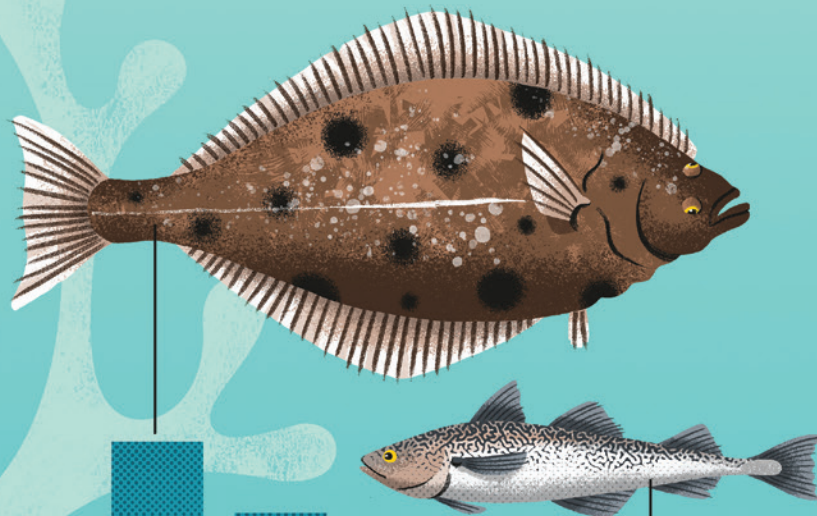
Seafood ranks high among consumers interested in healthy dishes. See how these numbers can help net those diners.



89%
Consumers who regard seafood as healthy, higher than poultry

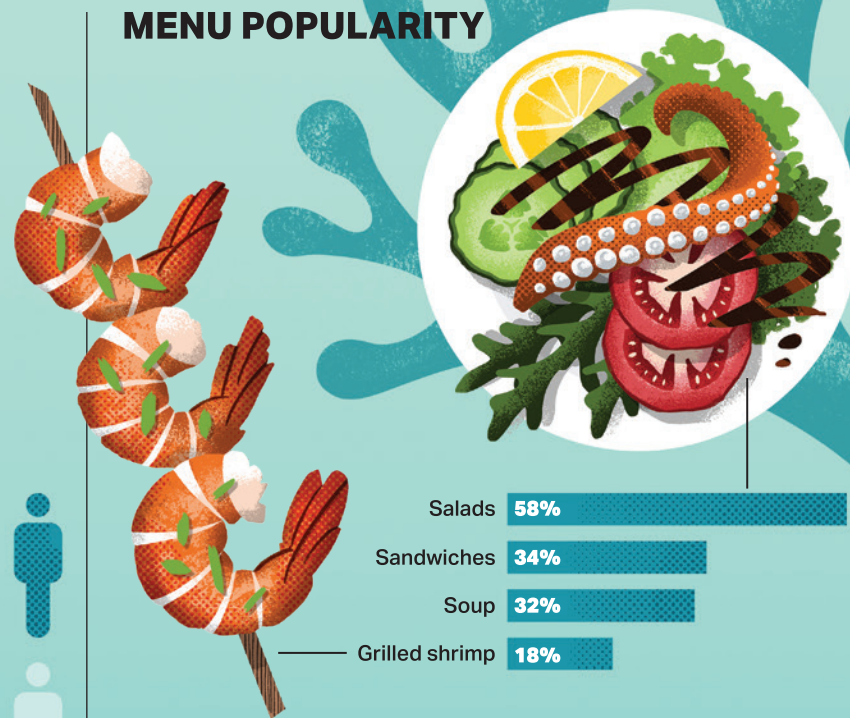


TOP-GROWING SEAFOOD TYPES*

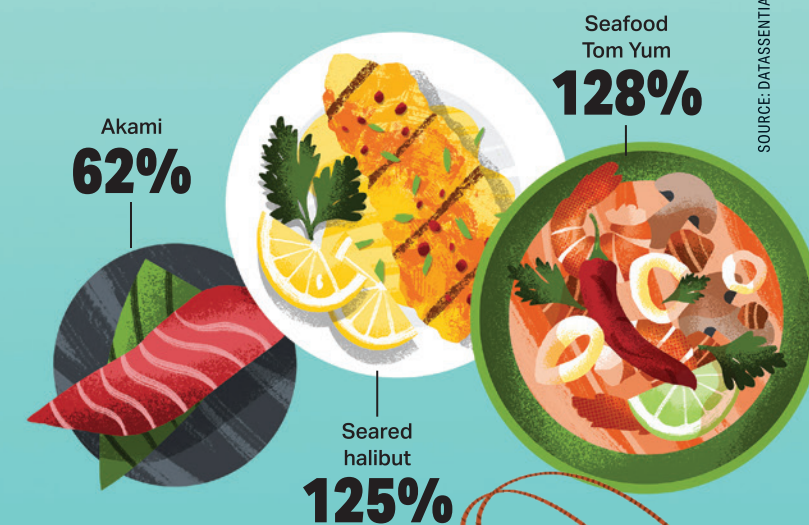


*Growth during the next several years

MENU POPULARITY



TOP-GROWING SEAFOOD DISHES



63%
Consumers who rank shrimp as their favorite shellfish

SOURCE: DATASSENTIAL ILLUSTRATION BY ADRIAN BAUER

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