

The opportunity lies in maintaining taste and offering real product improvement while also remaining true to your product category.



UK consumers in control of their health

By Barbara Katz, HealthFocus International

According to a recent article in The Independent newspaper, Tesco, Britain's biggest grocer, reports "buoyant sales of fresh produce, particularly brightly-colored vegetables with high vitamin content." A spokeswoman explains, "People are becoming more adventurous in the fruits and vegetables they choose and how they eat them – for example, using fruit to whizz up into a smoothie."

The article in *The Independent* referred to "a quiet revolution" taking place in British dietary habits. With my curiosity piqued, I went into the HealthFocus Trend database to see if the information concurred with Tesco's observations. I found what I would call a seismic shift rather than a quiet revolution. Some of this may just be American exuberance, as compared to the more refined British tendency toward reserved understatement. However, the numbers seem to be telling a story.

Often, trend data will notch up one or two percentage points adding up to a significant shift over time. But in the past two years, we have seen a marked increase in people's sense of control over their own health and wellness in the UK that is simply not occurring with the same ferocity in the U.S. and other markets. More than 69 percent of UK shoppers feel they can control their future health, up from 53 percent in 2003. Rapidly growing numbers of shoppers tell us they feel better when they eat healthy, are more productive and they feel good about themselves.

There is a huge (18 percentage points) increase in the number of people who say their diet is very important to them, coupled with a 7 percentage point increase in those who are now exercising regularly. I checked this exercise thing out in Germany, Spain and Italy. There was no significant increase in regular exercise anywhere else, and there was even a decline in Italy.

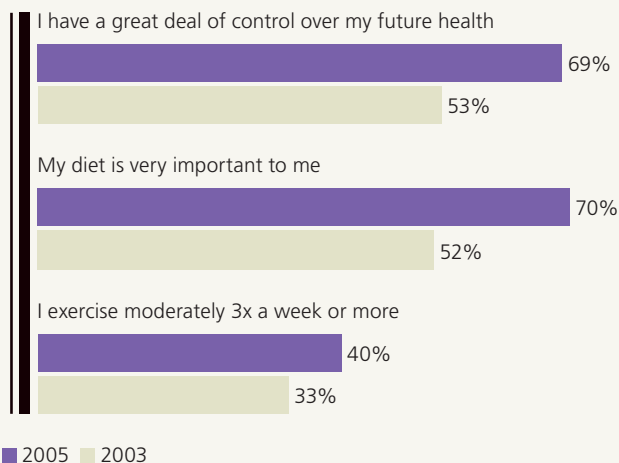
What I believe we are seeing in the UK is a massive, growing sense of personal confidence around health and nutrition fueled by the government, which has been extraordinarily vocal about undesirable food ingredients and clarity in food content labeling. HealthFocus International hears often about increased consumer concern over processed food, and we are seeing a decrease in the number of consumers who say they prefer purchasing well-known brands. So while this consumer march toward better nutrition does present an opportunity for

manufacturers, consumers will need continued convincing that manufacturers are actually their allies in this pursuit.


There are plenty of health-oriented products that are doing well in the UK – brands like Actimel, Lucozade, Twinings teas, Flora spreads with plant sterols and the Hovis Healthiest Ever bread line to name a few. But with consumer cynicism still simmering, the opportunity lies in maintaining taste and offering real product improvement while also remaining true to your product category.

Repositioning a product that doesn't fit the health and nutrition mold does not work because consumers are wise. If people want to eat potato chips, they will do so anyway; but

WHAT BRITONS SAY ABOUT FOOD AND HEALTH



Source HealthFocus International United Kingdom Trend Report

they are doing it for indulgence, not for heart health. If you can add a logical, fitting benefit to any product without sacrificing taste, you will reduce the guilt associated with indulgence and consumers will reward you for your honesty. This is true in all markets. 

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