

Baby Boomers and the Role of Nutraceutical Ingredients

- ▶ How can your products specifically address the needs of the Baby Boomer generation?
- ▶ What is the Boomer generation's main concern in regard to food ingredients?
- ▶ What are the top three benefits Boomers recognize for both fiber and whole grains?

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Research from the Natural Marketing Institute (NMI) shows U.S. consumers, including Baby Boomers (Boomers), understand the connection between overall consumption of foods and beverages and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

One of the ways consumers are making sure the foods they consume are healthy is by more closely monitoring both positive and negative ingredients in their foods and by being more conscientious of the impact these ingredients may have on their present and future health. The data in this article were compiled from a variety of NMI proprietary research vehicles, including *The Health and Wellness Trends Database* and *Healthy Aging/Boomer Database*.

Usage and Avoidance Trends

Compared to 20 years ago, Boomers are most concerned about getting more fiber in their diets. They also desire foods and beverages with vitamins and minerals, heart-healthy ingredients, and antioxidants. All consumers, Boomers in particular, are looking for more nutrient-rich foods instead of foods filled with “empty” calories. Whole grains also reside near the top of desired ingredients, possibly prompted by the media “noise” surrounding the positive benefits of whole grains.

Boomers' main food and beverage concerns today pertain to ingredients associ-

ated with health problems (such as cholesterol and fat), not issues such as artificial colors and flavors. Surprisingly, half of Boomers want foods with fewer pesticides, more so than fewer calories or even carbohydrates. While carbohydrates and calories may seem to be in the forefront of much food messaging, pesticides are significantly more of a concern to Boomers. Boomers may perceive that pesticides and toxins have a more detrimental effect on their health than other more prominently hyped negative ingredients.

Whole Grains and Fiber

The American Heart Association recommends eating a variety of food fiber sources. Fiber is important for the health of the digestive system, lowering cholesterol, and protecting against cancers, among other things. Furthermore, dietary fiber may promote satiety by slowing digestion, leading to an overall decrease in calorie intake. While few may know the recommended daily intake is between 21 and 38 g of fiber per day for adults (Fig. 1), only a minority consider themselves deficient in fiber. This may be due to the fact that half report actively seeking out high-fiber foods, and the vast majority have used high-fiber foods and beverages in the past year.

One key way of incorporating fiber into the diet is to consume whole grains; many are indeed doing so. An overwhelming majority have used whole grains in the past year, and only one-quarter feel their diets are fiber deficient. The top three benefits

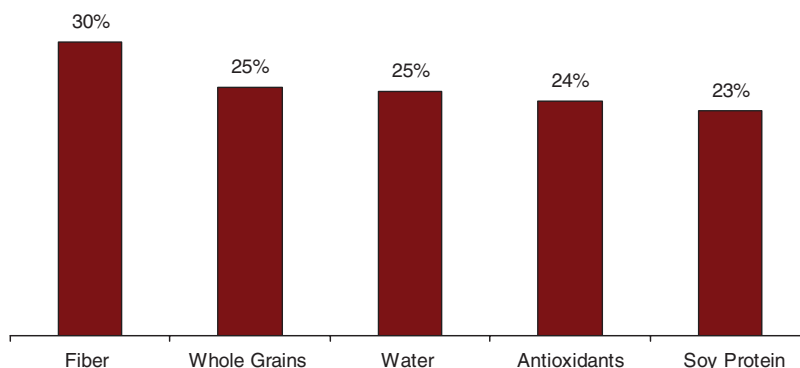


Fig. 1. Nutrients Boomers feel are deficient in their diet. Source: NMI Health and Wellness Trends Database, 2007.

that Boomers recognize for both fiber and whole grains are digestive health, weight management, and cancer prevention.

Glycemic Index: Awareness and Usage

Awareness of the term “glycemic index” continues to grow. Currently, 63% of Boomers have heard of the glycemic index, which is slightly higher than the general population of primary grocery shoppers. Growth in awareness in large part may be due to the continued escalation in obesity and diabetes and the related diets and foods touting how understanding and analyzing the glycemic index can counter these conditions.

Parallel increases in awareness and usage of foods with a low-glycemic index has increased as well. Half of all Boomers indicate usage of low-glycemic foods and beverages. Fewer have indicated that they have either added or avoided foods to stabilize blood sugar levels, and these actions are generally stable over time. Consumers appear to prefer foods specifically designed as low glycemic rather than trying to figure out on their own which foods to add or eliminate from their diets. Whether this is due to consumer confusion or lack of time or interest in doing the work to figure out how specific foods impact blood sugar, there appears to be an opportunity to promote food and beverages designed to easily achieve this goal.

Attitudes toward Sugar

Concerns over the sugar content in diets continue to be important, and consumers are taking action. The majority of Boomers typically watch the sugar content in what they eat, while slightly more than half usually check the label for the form and content of sugar before they make a purchase. Half want foods that do not contain any added sugar. As the incidence of obesity and diabetes continues to rise, consumers are likely to be more vigilant about their dietary sugar content, carefully scrutinizing their choices.

Boomers are more attentive to the sugar content in their diets than are younger consumers. Those age 50-plus are more likely to not only be concerned about, but also currently managing conditions that are related to sugars, including diabetes, blood sugar imbalances, and obesity. Their focus on sugar intake is well directed. Figure 2 presents the sweeteners Boomers use on a regular basis to sweeten foods or beverages. This receptive audience is a viable target for low- and no-sugar products that will aid their efforts to make healthy changes. Sugar consumption is also a fundamental issue for families with children.

Food Purity and Environmental and Social Concerns

Concerns over food safety and purity are important to most Boomers. Figure 3 presents concerns with foods and beverages reported by Boomers today compared to 20 years ago. They are increasingly interested in foods grown without pesticides and free from antibiotics, hormones, and artificial additives, on par, or slightly above, general population consumers. One way to secure control over the integrity of foods and beverages is to “buy local,” where consumers have greater opportunities to become familiar with the producers and learn how the products are grown or manufactured. Three-quarters of Boomers are looking for locally grown produce, and more than half (60%) would like their stores to feature packaged foods from local vendors.

In addition to food safety, consumers express strong environmental and social concerns about the foods they eat. Most want to know that meat and poultry are raised humanely and that what they eat does not contain any GMOs. And, while locally grown products have obvious safety implications, there are environmental ramifications as well, including lower food miles and supporting the local economy.

Addressing the unique needs of the Baby Boomer population is a prime opportunity across many industries, including foods and beverages, nutritional supplements, and alternative healthcare, to name a few. Opportunities are prevalent for providing solutions for aging consumers, so they can retain their independence, control, and dignity, in essence, their quality of life.

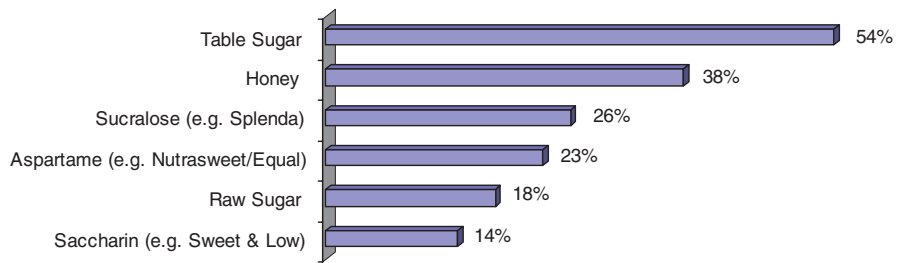


Fig. 2. Sweeteners used by Boomers on a regular basis. Source: NMI Health and Wellness Trends Database, 2007.

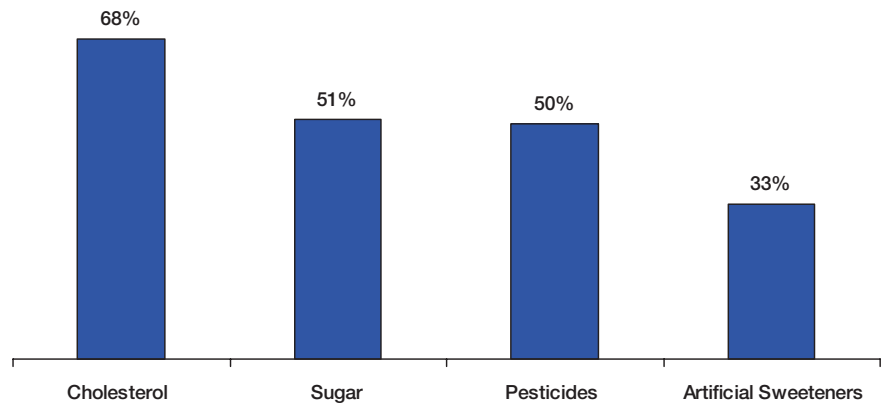


Fig. 3. Nutritional issues of concern to Boomers today—versus 20 years ago. Source: NMI's Healthy Aging/Boomer Database, 2008.



Greg Stephens is vice president of strategic consulting at the Natural Marketing Institute (NMI). More information on this subject can be found in NMI's Health & Wellness Trends Report on Healthy Aging/Boomer Report or by visiting www.nmi-solutions.com. Stephens can be reached at Greg.Stephens@NMIsolutions.com.