

Raising the Bar (on Chocolate)

Indulgence is key to making nutrition bars more attractive.



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It's been a tough year, or tough couple of years for some, and people are looking for small indulgences to help themselves feel a little better.

However, the health-conscious among us don't want to resort to calorie-dense, nutritionally-poor foods. Fortunately, the makers of nutrition bars seem to realize that and many are making their bars not only nutritionally sound, but also something of an indulgence.

Last October, Atkins Nutritionals, Denver, CO, introduced six new bars, including the Endulge Nutty Fudge Brownie, the Chocolate Caramel Mousse Bar and the Chocolate Oatmeal Fiber Bar, which all include 6.8 grams of protein, 7.6 grams of fiber, just 1 gram of sugar and 4 net carbs.

"With the added chocolate, consumers look forward to these bars," said Lisa Wells,

brand manager. "They get to indulge but don't feel bad about it." While the bars don't currently contain dark chocolate, the company is looking to develop some that do.

"Dark chocolate is currently a growing trend based on the perceived health benefits (i.e., antioxidants) by consumers, as well as the fact that dark chocolate is viewed as a 'good for you' treat," added Ms. Wells.

A Top Seller

In 2009, Attune Foods, San Francisco, CA, launched Almond Milk Chocolate, Coffee Bean Dark Chocolate and Raspberry Dark Chocolate bars, having seen a spike in sales a year before when it launched four bars with chocolate.

"We know that chocolate consumption cuts across the American population, so

the idea of consuming chocolate is much more acceptable to everyone and people look forward to it," said Rob Hurlbut, the company's CEO.

The first four bars the company introduced were all made with dark chocolate, and two of the new bars also intend to cater to consumers' demands since they've been hearing about dark chocolate's health benefits for several years now.

However, one of the new bars is Almond Milk Chocolate, because almonds and milk

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- Portion control: size matters
- Untapped potential
- Innovation

“seem to be a very natural fit together,” said Mr. Hurlbut, “and we wanted another option for milk chocolate fans.”

Nutrition bars with chocolate are “real food rather than a candy treat,” said Melissa Abbott, senior trendspotter and analyst with Tinderbox, part of The Hartman Group, Bellevue, WA. “Getting that into a nutrition bar means it can sate people on both a physical and a mental level.”

Indeed, research indicates that chocolate is one of the top flavors consumers are looking for. According to the Global New Products Database from Chicago, IL-based research firm Mintel International, from February 2009, chocolate, caramel and nuts were among the top 20 snack/energy bar flavors launched in the past year (see Table 1).

“[Chocolate] is a popular product at the moment because people think they can ‘get away with’ eating an indulgent product. They justify it because dark chocolate is supposed to be ‘good for you’,” said Marcia Mogelonsky, senior market analyst with Mintel.

Other companies dishing up chocolate in their nutrition bars include Amazing Grass, San Francisco, CA, which offers four bars, two of which contain chocolate.

Flavor	Number of variants launched
Chocolate	43
Peanut Butter	29
Blueberry	11
Chocolate and Peanut Butter	10
Strawberry	10
Apple and Cinnamon	8
Peanut Butter and Chocolate	7
Chocolate and Peanut	7
Chocolate (Dark)	7
Berry	6
Marshmallow	5
Cinnamon	5
Cookies and Cream	5
S'mores	4
Banana and Nut	4
Chocolate and Caramel	4
Honey	4
Apple	4
Unflavored/Plain	4
Peanut and Chocolate	3

Source: Mintel Global New Products Database, October 2009

“We’ve found that people really gravitate toward chocolate for the nutritional benefits but also for the taste,” said Brandon Bert, one of the company’s co-founders. The chocolate is also a great way of masking the strong flavor of the green superfoods that these bars contain, which can take some getting used to, he said.

“We do receive feedback from some ‘chocoholics’—both women and men—that our chocolate-coated bars are a great fix for their chocolate craving,” he added.

The only downside to adding chocolate to nutrition bars, said Mr. Hurlbut from Attune, is that it adds saturated fat to the nutritional makeup. “But that’s just the

reality of chocolate, and there’s not much we can do about that,” he said. “Life is about choices and moderation and 3.5 grams of fat is on the low end. Plus, science shows we need some fat.”

Portion Control: Size Matters

Portion control is another nutrition bar trend that’s starting to be seen in new products. Clif Bar and LUNA (owned by Clif Bar & Company, Berkeley, CA) have already launched smaller varieties of their bars in the form of the Clif Shot Rokks, Clif Bar Minis and LUNA Minis.

The company describes Clif Bar Roks as “the first pop-and-go protein bites for performance athletes,” since they are around the size of a grape and contain the correct amount of protein athletes need for recovery after exercise. Clif Shot Roks are sold 10 bites to a packet—20 grams of protein in all—making it simple for athletes to customize their protein intake.

Clif Bar Minis come in small, 28.4-gram sizes, less than half the size of the regular 68-gram Clif bars. LUNA Minis, aimed at women, have just 80 calories, 4 grams of protein, are high in folic acid and offer a “good source” of calcium.

These fit in nicely with the growing trend for portion-controlled foods, said Bill Patterson, senior market analyst with Mintel.

However, he’s been surprised to hear of a need for larger nutrition bars for men. Mintel research in November 2008 showed that one-third of men (32%) indicated they’d like a larger bar (as opposed to just 24% of women). The strongest reason was to aid recovery after exercise, Mr. Patterson pointed out, followed by using the bar as a meal replacement, and thirdly, to help build muscle.

Larger bars may also mean the bars become more valid as meal replacements. For many women and Baby Boomers (whose appetite may have decreased with age) bars are already consumed in place of meals, but larger varieties could offer more potential in this category.

Tinderbox’s Ms. Abbott foresees the different sizes of bars being packaged together in variety packs to satisfy different needs or the needs of different people in one household.

Art Eggertsen, founder of Salt Lake City, UT-based Probar, said he expects to see more portion-controlled products in the future as consumers shift from looking for portion-control to nutrient-control. “Over the next two to three years people will start to go from counting calories to counting nutrients, and bars make that really easy,” he said.

Probar launched a new line of bars last June called “Fruition,” with four fruity flavors (Blueberry, Strawberry, Peach and Cranberry-Raspberry) in a snack size of 1.7 oz., which compares to 3 oz. for the company’s other bars.

“They’re an effort to reach out to individuals who are not seeking a meal replacement bar,” said Mr. Eggertsen. “Fruition bars are

snack/energy bars for between meals when energy and blood sugar levels dip, and they will maintain them for two to three hours.”

Fruition bars are also fruit-based, which means they are lower in calories, at 160 per serving. The bars contain two servings of fruit, as well as organic rolled oats and white and black chia seeds.

Untapped Potential

However, there’s still a largely untapped market out there when it comes to nutrition bars.

According to Mintel’s Nutrition and Energy Bars report, March 2009, only 14% of consumers said they eat these products, although research from The Nielsen Company, New York, NY, showed sales of nutrition bars are up slightly (in food, drug and mass merchandisers, excluding WalMart) by 0.8% for the year ended September 5, 2009 (a decline over the same period a year before, when sales were up 3.7%).

Beyond convenience, snacking and energy, what are consumers looking for in nutrition bars these days?

Digestion and gut health continue to be very important, especially as more products touting their fiber content and probiotic ingredients appear on store shelves.

Launches of new probiotic foods and beverages worldwide continue to be strong, according to Datamonitor’s Product Launch Analytics. Last year alone, through September 30, 505 products were launched—putting the year on track to see more than the 605 probiotic-products launched in 2008, and almost double the 360 that were launched in 2006.

Attune Foods is the big player in the probiotic bar category, and was the first bar to be sold in stores’ refrigerated sections. Attune bars contain at least 6.1 billion live cultures of *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, *Lactobacillus casei* and *Bifidobacterium lactis*, and each is dosed to have at least the recommended number of probiotics by the end of their shelf-life.

The fairly recent emergence of probiotics has helped fiber make its return to the spotlight. Fiber has come full-circle, according to Ms. Wells, from Atkins. “People are putting an emphasis on healthy living,” she said. “Boomers are getting older and seeing weight

WineTime Set to Make a Splash

One company that’s really upping the ante on indulgence is Rancho Santa Fe, CA-based ResVez. In late 2009, the company launched the WineTime bar, which contains dark chocolate and two different sources of resveratrol, the compound that’s been hailed as an anti-aging, antioxidant compound.

Although studies are still in their infancy, resveratrol has been shown to help protect a person’s cells from free-radical damage, inhibit the spread of cancer, lower blood pressure, improve heart health, reduce inflammation and help prevent Alzheimer’s disease.

Indeed, the bars contain more resveratrol than 50 glasses of red wine, as well as other healthful but rich ingredients such as dates, almonds and seven “superfruits” (cranberry, noni, pomegranate, goji berry, acai, mangosteen and blueberry). And one thing’s for sure: a WineTime bar won’t lead to a hangover!

“We’re the first-to-market with a bar with resveratrol in it,” said Malcolm Nicholl, president and CEO. “It’s almost like a wine experience because you can smell the wine when you open [the bar] and indulgence is a big part of it.”

Also important to Mr. Nicholl is what’s not in the bar: trans fats, high-fructose corn syrup, gluten, dairy and artificial ingredients. It’s also high in fiber, with 7 grams, which was simply a “pleasant surprise” once the bar was formulated, said Mr. Nicholl. —AB



issues and cholesterol problems. And younger parents are aware of the issues of weight and diabetes with their kids, and the fact that Generation Y may not outlive their parents. So parents want to be role models [with what they eat].”

Innovation

While indulgence, convenience, energy and health are all being sought from nutrition bars, manufacturers are not slowing in their innovation in bringing out new products.

Last August, Amazing Grass launched its Chocolate Peanut Butter Protein Bar and its Berry Whole Food Energy Bar. The peanut butter bar has 270 calories, 12 grams of protein, 14 grams of omega fats, 19 grams of sugar and 28 grams of carbohydrates.

All of the company's bars include Green Superfood, which combines a number of ingredients, such as acai powder, maca, FOS (Fructo-oligosaccharide)—a prebiotic from chicory root—and digestive enzymes, all of which have been minimally processed.

According to the company, Green Superfood contains naturally occurring enzymes, carotenoids, phytonutrients and antioxidants that, together, fight free radicals, remove toxins and repair damaged cells with the antioxidant power of seven servings of fruit or vegetables.

“More and more people are starting to know what a superfood is,” said Mr. Bert, one of the company's co-founders. “It's a great way to get more green vegetables into people's diets. The problem is that most people don't have time to eat fresh vegetables.”

Another company that's focusing on all-natural plant ingredients is Vega, a division of Sequel Naturals, Port Coquitlam, British Columbia, Canada. The company's latest products, the Vibrancy Bars, were launched in September 2008 in three flavors: Chocolate Decadence, Green Synergy and Wholesome Original.

Each contains raw, organic, and enzymatically-active plant-based superfoods, including sprouted buckwheat, sprouted almonds, acai, Salba and hemp seeds. They

are also vegan, gluten-free, sprouted, alkaline-forming, and rich in omega 3s, antioxidants and phytonutrients.

The company already had three Whole Food Energy Bars on the market, which are more carbohydrate-based and intended for consumption pre- or post-exercise. “The Vibrancy Bars are more of a healthy balanced snack,” said Brendan Brazier, product formulator.

An integral part of all Vega bars is the sprouted ingredients, which in the energy bars include mung beans and flax seeds, and in the Vibrancy bars include almonds and buckwheat.

“Sprouted ingredients are very easy to digest,” said Mr. Brazier, “and people need easily digested foods before exercise to transport oxygen.” They are also incredibly nutrient-dense foods, he added.

Sprouting foods also convert their starch to sugar, which the human body needs to use it. Since the sprouted foods do this independently, the body doesn't have to, and can conserve energy. 