



# Opportunities in snacking are primed for dairy ingredients

**A look into daily snack patterns offers insight for dairy manufacturers to tap into what consumers are looking for with their snacks.**

**F**or product innovators, creators and sellers, knowing and anticipating the habits of consumers is a necessity. The switch from three meals a day to multiple mini-meals is one change that hasn't stumped us, but empowered us to think differently about how snacks are presented. With about 46% of consumers snacking three or more times a day, and 36% believing it is better to snack rather than eat large meals, a new opportunity for innovation presented itself.

This trend is more than providing a continuous supply of snacks — it is also about giving consumers what they want during each eating occasion.

Consumers have specific snacking desires they look for throughout the day, including energy in the morning, convenience in the afternoon and calming in the evening. This specificity is creating more complexity in formulations. Consumers want everything from added benefits, more nutrition and unique flavor varieties, to high-quality and functional ingredients.

Let's visit the trends seen at each eating occasion and learn why U.S. dairy proteins are the ingredients to help achieve needs.

## Diverse eating occasions

As the day progresses, people focus less on benefits and more on (healthier) indulgence. Breakfast continues to be a growing snacking opportunity, as shown in a study that stated that more than half of the U.S. population is snacking during the morning hours. However, consumers have not forgotten the importance of breakfast, so nutrition should be present alongside convenience. Benefits, such as energy boosts or increased protein, are key. Research shows that consumers should eat more protein at breakfast to balance out their intake.

Not only are consumers snacking more at breakfast, but the foods that are usually

found at breakfast are being eaten at different parts of the day. Breakfast cookies, sandwiches and bars are being marketed as all-day food items. Combined with the trend of all-day breakfast, convenience and portability are essential characteristics of midday snacks. Consumers look for items that can be eaten while at work or on the road and offer an energy boost, satiety or enhancement for their afternoon workout.

Moving into evening, consumers want something less energizing and more comforting. They look for a snack that is indulgent and offers a benefit (relaxation, vitamins, stress relief). The trend of value-added ingredients in indulgent evening snacks is often known as "guilt-free snacking." So try to make the evening hours a sensory experience with less sugar, more nutrition, warm smells and rich tastes.

Snacks meant for early morning, mid-day and evening need differentiation, with claims, flavors and benefits.

## Creating successful snacks

Consumers want variety. One way to offer this is through a large flavor assortment (take risks!). Eighty-eight percent of consumers look for the specific flavors they prefer, and 70% buy multiple flavors of the same snack. Because flavor and taste preferences differ across age groups, having options that are personalized to a wider audience is ideal. Since high-quality U.S. dairy ingredients have a mild flavor, they are a great platform for flavor experimentation without altering intended flavor profiles.

Consumers also make their snack decisions based on claims shown on the packaging. Claims like premium ingredients, no additives, no added sugar and fewer preservatives are differentiating products in the market. Consumers no longer settle for standard ingredients but look for premium snack

products that offer more than just satisfying their hunger.

Why premium? Premium ingredients provide specific benefits others cannot. Research shows that 57% of consumers want additional health benefits beyond nutrition, 57% want snacks that contain vitamins and minerals, 37% look for probiotics, 60% want all-day fuel. The top sought-out nutritional benefits include cancer prevention, lowered heart disease risk and weight loss.

## High-quality dairy ingredients

Whether it is digestive health, weight loss or workout enhancement, U.S. dairy proteins (whey and milk) are among the highest quality available. High-quality ingredients composed of dairy proteins complement a wide variety of flavor profiles due to their mild dairy taste. These proteins are a complete source of essential and nonessential amino acids that are naturally found in dairy foods, unlike some other protein sources.

Whey proteins stand out as a top source of branched-chain amino acids, including leucine, which stimulates muscle protein synthesis. Whey protein even helps with post-exercise muscle repair, recovery and lean muscle building. Dairy proteins also aid in weight management by increasing the feeling of satiation, curbing hunger and reducing calorie consumption. Because these proteins found in milk have many functional benefits, formulators can use them to create snack options that give consumers products for each snacking occasion. ■

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