



Top Trends in Nutrition and Health Coaching



AFPA

HEALTH, NUTRITION & FITNESS

Introduction

It's no secret that the wellness industry is always evolving. With new science being released every day, nutrition professionals need to stay on the cutting edge to keep their knowledge up-to-date and serve clients to the best of their ability. At AFPA, we're dedicated to helping you stay ahead of the curve. So, let's take a look at some of the key trends that fitness professionals will need to be aware of.



Microbiome Health



It's a whole new world—in your gut that is! Humans are composed of over [100 trillion microbes](#)—the majority of which live in the large intestine or gut. The microbiome is the genetic material of all the microbes that live on and inside the human body. It helps us digest food, regulate our immune system, and produce vitamins, like B, B12, thiamine, and riboflavin. Needless to say, having a healthy and highly functional microbiome is essential to our health.

On top of immunity and health, the opposite is also true. Poor gut health can lead to a host of diseases ranging from autoimmune diseases, arthritis, dementia, heart disease, depression, and even cancer. Gut health also plays an important role in obesity because the gut influences hormone production, nutrient extraction, and fat storage. An impaired intestinal microbiome can also lead to intestinal hyperpermeability, or leaky gut syndrome, that can precede and mediate these different diseases.

So, how can we keep our gut health in check? Science shows that naturally [fermented foods](#), such as kefir, kombucha, and kimchi, contain probiotics, which

aid [healthy digestion](#). Probiotics are live microorganisms that support the gut, says Dr. David S. Ludwig, a professor of nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health. Some studies also suggest people snack on nondigestible carbohydrates called prebiotics. [Prebiotics, such as asparagus](#), bananas, and whole grains, encourage “good” bacteria to multiply in the gut because they act as a food source for the healthy bacteria. Other gut-flora superstars? Fresh vegetables, whole fruits, herbs and spices, ancient grains—and even small amounts of red wine. Science also shows that keeping stress low, avoiding unnecessary antibiotics, and keeping sugar to a minimum are great ways to encourage a healthy microbiome. We’ve written [an entire blog post on how to restore balance within the gut](#).

Nutritionists and nutrition professionals can take advantage of the trend by understanding how the microbiome works and giving science-backed advice to clients on how to keep theirs in top shape. As a nutrition professional, you might also proactively educate clients on the microbiome who may not necessarily be aware of its implications on health.

You can [read more about the microbiome](#) on our blog.





Epigenetics

We've all heard the expression you are what you eat. With epigenetics, that mantra rings true. To put it simply, epigenetics is the study of biological mechanisms [that will switch genes on and off](#). Epigenetics affects how genes are read by cells, and subsequently whether the cells should produce relevant proteins that ultimately impact our body and how it functions. This gene expression controls everything in our bodies—including wellness or disease.

Epigenetics purports that all of the factors that are part of our environment can cause chemical modifications around genes that will turn those genes on or off over time. Those factors include where we live, exercise, how much we sleep, and more. Of course, what we eat is a key component to this as well. Nutrition professionals can help clients research and understand what to eat to stave off some of the negative gene “switches”—including those that [can eventually lead to diseases, such as cancer and Alzheimer's](#).

The impacts of these mutations can be mitigated by a personalized, supportive diet. While there's no denying genes are a major factor—our day-to-day diet,

lifestyle practices, and environmental exposures can, in fact, have a massive impact on preventing negative health outcomes.

For those not necessarily worried about disease prevention but simply want to try to lessen the impact aging has on their body—treating food as medicine can be a great way to go. The science behind the impact of food on well-being is continuing to grow. Nutrition professionals can support clients in the growing focus on epigenetics and food as medicine by providing guidance and education on what foods may foster better health—and which may be detrimental.





Food and Inflammation

Closely linked to the idea of food-as-medicine and epigenetics is the connection between food and inflammation. Research shows that chronic inflammation in the body can lead to many types of disease—from cancer and diabetes to heart disease and Alzheimer’s. So, what exactly is it?

[Inflammation is a key part of the immune system’s response to injury and infection.](#) Essentially, it’s your body’s way of signaling to your immune system that there’s something that needs to be healed. This is inherently a good thing—it’s how we bounce back from illness and injury. However, inflammation over a long period of time can become problematic and lead to disease.

In the case of chronic inflammation, the inflammation process happens for too long or in the incorrect place. Luckily, inflammation doesn’t have to be permanent. There are certain foods that [reduce inflammation](#) (and, of course, others that fuel it). Foods like tomatoes, olive oil, and green leafy vegetables do wonders on the body and for keeping inflammation at bay.

Nutrition professionals should recommend [fruits and vegetables, such as blueberries, apples,](#) and leafy greens, that are high in natural antioxidants and polyphenols—protective compounds found in plants—to their clients. Professionals in the nutrition space also may work these anti-inflammatory foods into diet plans and programs. Many have other great benefits, too, like providing vitamins, being low in calories, and being good for health overall.





Focus on Sustainability

We only have one planet—and caring more about it is becoming an increasingly popular trend. While sustainability isn't a new concept, it's taking a main stage in the wellness and nutrition world. There are many complex factors that are part of what “sustainable” food means, but it's helpful to understand a few.

To begin with, nutrition professionals should be aware of [sustainable farming practices](#). Sustainable agriculture supports organic, low carbon food production and avoids the use of artificial fertilizers. It also steers clear of genetically modified organisms, which can also impact human health negatively. It's also becoming more popular for farms and food producers to minimize their environmental impact—whether it's through ensuring they're not polluting the air or water, installing solar panels, or finding other creative ways to protect the earth from the impact of the food production.

Another key sustainable farming practice is regenerative agriculture. According to [The Carbon Underground and Regenerative Agriculture Initiative at California State University, Chico](#), “‘Regenerative Agriculture’ describes farming and grazing

practices that, among other benefits, reverse climate change by rebuilding soil organic matter and restoring degraded soil biodiversity—resulting in both carbon drawdown and improving the water cycle.” Similarly, organic farming produces crops without the use of preservatives, radiation, genetic modification, sewage sludge, synthetic fertilizers, and chemical pesticides.

On a smaller scale, nutrition professionals and clients alike can also take an individual approach to sustainability. Many may choose to use reusable containers, utensils, or sustainable food wraps such as beeswax instead of plastic. Nutrition professionals should get familiar with brands who include sustainability as part of their business model. You also might find local farmer’s markets to shop from in lieu of perusing larger grocery stores (which tend to have a greater impact on the environment because of shipment emissions etc.). These are only a few of the many ways nutrition professionals might incorporate sustainability into their careers.





Health-Conscious Workplaces

Did you know most people [spend just over thirteen years of their lives at work](#)? Since much of our time is spent at our workplaces, it's no wonder that wellness is becoming a bigger topic of conversation for employers and employees alike.

With a [more health-conscious workplace](#), employers can expect to see decreased absences, reduced workplace accidents, and increased productivity. Employees, on the other hand, benefit from improved health; reduced risk of chronic diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes; and improved job satisfaction. So, what exactly does this look like in practice?

Wellness in the workplace can take many forms, but there are plenty of options for [employers to look at](#). For example, some workplaces include healthy transit options, like biking programs; smoking cessation programs; and paramedical services, such as massage therapy or acupuncture. Others invest in spaces for naps or wellness adventures, like golfing or laser tag. Nutrition professionals also play a key role in many corporate wellness programs. Some companies may offer one-on-one consultations on diet and nutrition. Others need nutrition

professionals to help them develop curriculum and factual information for online programs.

All in all, [nutrition is becoming an increasingly important component](#) of corporate wellness programs and can really be a space for nutrition professionals to thrive.





Wearables & Tracking Technology

Working out, eating well, and establishing a healthy routine can feel like a long road. However, with the [rise of wearables and tracking technology](#), it's easier for nutrition professionals and clients to more easily quantify their progress. Fitness trackers, such as [Fitbit](#) and [Garmin](#), have been in existence for quite some time now, but their technology is improving, and new players are entering the space.

One of the most popular types of wearable fitness trackers is watches. Fitness tracking watches measure steps taken, heart rate, sleep, and more. Most are accompanied by an online or mobile app where users are able to track and better understand their nutrition. Each app is different, but many can easily calculate what your clients are taking in—from carbs and fiber all the way down to vitamins and minerals in food. While not applicable to everyone, trackers that measure food allergies are also [becoming more widely available](#).

But it doesn't stop there. There are also other even more advanced trackers, like smart scales, water bottles—and even products coming down the pipeline that [measure skin pH](#). Nutrition professionals can leverage the data collected with

these tools to help clients stay on track with their nutrition and get a larger picture of what food and hydration they're actually taking in. Best of all, trackers can be a very helpful tool for nutrition professionals who work remotely. Because the data is all online, you can easily analyze it without having to have an in-person meeting.

Although not wearable tech, you can check out some of the tech platforms we've vetted for [making communication easier with your clients](#) and [running your health and nutrition business](#).





Why Does it Matter?

At the end of the day—trends inevitably phase in and out. As a nutrition professional, you're not required to change your methodology to adapt to every single one. However, by continually staying up-to-date, you'll be able to ease client anxieties and give them the assurance that you're a dedicated professional. Want to increase your knowledge even deeper? [Take a look at our expert-vetted courses.](#)



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