

RAISING THE BAR on nutrition



It's no secret that there has been a global shift towards healthy snacking. Just walk through the aisle of your local supermarket's snack section and you'll begin to see chips that are 'made from all natural ingredients', 'no GMOs' and 'no preservatives, additives or artificial colouring'. These are just some of the claims slapped across in near billboard fashion on the labels of these snack foods.

Snack bars are no different. Evolving global markets for sports bars, nutrition bars and diet bars are undoubtedly a result of claim proven, technical and bio actively functional innovative ingredients, not forgetting that the nutritional bar market has the ability to tap into multiple client bases.

Known as energy bars, nutrition bars, supplement bars and so forth, these bars typically contain cereals and various high-energy ingredients such as nuts & dried fruits, and functional ingredients such as added fibre, protein, vitamins & minerals.

Energy bars are meant to provide quick energy for the body, or at least it's marketed that way. That's why they are normally fortified with essential nutrients and vitamins. They typically come in various flavours that can cater to a whole range of tastes. Read on as the food experts of Asia highlights some of the various 'bars' made for different target markets and what the future might hold for these energy bars.



Sports Bars – Before & Now

In search of a winning competitive edge in sports activity, **sports bars** were developed and marketed as **ergogenic aids** in the 1970's. The purpose was to meet the energy requirements of elite athletes participating in long distance running. Today, these products have been **fine-tuned with redefined functional ingredients** such as **Palatinose**, to provide a more efficient slow release of energy during sports activity- without a sudden rise in blood glucose levels, thus the term "**low-glycaemic energy bars**".

Scientific evidence also shows that protein bars enriched with whey proteins that contain high levels of **leucine, isoleucine and valine**, are essential for immediate muscle building and restoration of strength in athletes. Couple those selling points with various flavours like 'Cookies n Cream', 'Chocolate Fudge', 'Vanilla Ice' or a 'Lite' option that is usually plain and lower in calories, protein bar makers get to target a whole range of age groups for the discerning gym goer.

The Granola Innovation

Granola, a well-liked breakfast snack around the world usually consists of **whole grain products** that are crumbled and then baked or pressed. They became popular in the 19th century and have seen a steady growth in most diverse markets.

Today, these snacks have progressed into **healthy and functional** nutritional bars with innovative ingredients added to give out more benefits. **Oligofructose, inulin and fiber** extracted from chicory root, when added to granola bars enhances its **prebiotic/bifidogenic properties**. This in turn can improve a user's digestive system by reducing toxins and promoting the growth of healthy bacteria.

These fibers are also ideal for applications in low fat and low sugar nutrition bars, **providing only 50% sweetness but does not sacrifice in taste**. In recent scientific developments, these fibers can be modified to increase the absorption of dietary calcium of up to 20%.

To summarize, an 'energy bar' in today's world would not only give you more energy or help you with muscle growth, it would also **improve your digestive health and even increase your bone density**, giving you a bigger bang for your buck.





'City-Life' Bars

Certain working adults who are constantly on-the-go are always in search of healthy snacking alternatives that are rich in vitamins, minerals and other essential nutrients. This 'target market' will not necessarily go for energy bars that are rich in protein, but instead opt for more vital ingredients as they deem fit, such as vitamins and even antioxidants.

Hence, energy bars that target the working adults who are always on the move are starting to introduce healthy phytochemicals in their products. Phytochemicals such as lycopene, resveratrol and fruit concentrates from pomegranates, cranberries and blueberries are used in formulations to form healthy snacks and in this case, Granola bars that can help reduce stress levels and also bring about a whole host of added benefits for the human body.

Diabetic Living

Another market segmentation that has been on the rise are snacks for those with diabetes and in this case, diabetic snack bars. They typically contain resistant starch and other functional ingredients that can cause lower blood sugar levels, improved insulin absorption, satiety and various benefits for your digestive system.

A good example of a functional ingredient that could be used in a diabetic snack bar would be Palatinose, a disaccharide with a unique glucose-fructose binding which takes more time to be broken down than sucrose does. Palatinose is fully available in the small intestine, but is hydrolysed 4-5 times more slowly, leading to a low glycaemic response and to lower insulin levels.

In addition, diabetic snack bars are also enriched with antioxidants like vitamin C & E and minerals, notably chromium which is known to enhance the action of insulin.

What to Look Out For

It all depends on what you are looking for in a snack bar. **Weight watchers** will normally pick **low fat and sugar** bars from shelves, whereas **gym-goers** would typically choose protein bars that are **high in protein, creatine, BCAA** and other ingredients that could help with muscle recovery. If you're always on the move and are looking for a snack bar that can replace breakfast, you could try any one of those energy bars you see littered in pharmacies and convenience stores. Just pay close attention to their sugar and carbohydrate content as **some brands are unwilling to sacrifice sweetness and taste**, opting to use a high amount of traditional sugars instead of more functional ingredients.



Raising the bar in the future

It is forecasted that Asia and Asian Pacific regions will experience the fastest growing market for cereal bars by 2020. It is estimated that the market value for the global sports nutrition market will hit \$37.7 billion by 2019. With forecasted growth, comes even greater competition, look out for even more energy bars in the near future. We're excited to see what kind of flavours they come up with, Pandan Coffee bars anyone?



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