2026 & beyond

What next, where next in active nutrition?

October 2025

Introduction

When it comes to trends, we believe that – for the most part, at least – they're pretty obvious. You don't need us to tell you that protein's still big and GLP-1 is everywhere. Instead, we're going to look at the dynamics behind the active nutrition category to understand why something is trending and consider how products are being developed within that context.

The trends we're predicting for 2026 aren't just about new products or ingredients, they're about understanding the moments, routines, and experiences that shape consumer behaviour. The opportunities we're seeing lie in reframing the familiar and thinking about how to create products that truly fit into consumers' lives.

Because the challenge, for all of us, is that there's a lot going on. New products are hitting websites and social media feeds faster than they'd ever hit physical shelves and algorithms bombard you with 20 different products if you happen to linger on one relevant post.

Throughout this whitepaper, we'll explore examples of products and brands that are successfully cutting through this noise. In doing so, we'll bring each trend to life and help you understand how you can create solutions that combine function with experience, address real-world needs, and offer something that consumers can rely on every day.

Nick Morgan, founder, Nutrition Integrated

The third R: renaissance

While the footprint of the active nutrition industry remains stable with ingredients, needs and populations largely unchanged, innovation is thriving. But much of what's driving progress today isn't entirely new. It's the familiar, reframed through the lens of 2026 and revived for today's consumers.

Case study
Weight management

Hardly a day goes by without hearing about GLP-1, but GLP-1 is not the trend itself – the trend is the renaissance of weight management. GLP-1 is simply a mechanism within the weight management trend, albeit one that's influencing consumers whether they use it or not. In a world where we're all more aware of GLP-1, it's inevitable that we'll all rethink how we look and feel.

The big difference between weight management trends of old and the renaissance we're seeing now is the narrative – for the most part, it's no longer about simply losing weight or doing it to look a certain way, but is about a positive approach to health.

Meal replacements

We're seeing a huge increase in products that would fall into the definition of meal replacements. But meal replacements are changing from the low calorie, low protein, low fibre shakes of days gone by. Now the focus is on providing complete foods, containing all the macro and micronutrients that would be found in a standard meal.

Clear protein drinks

The clear protein category continues to see massive growth in both ready-to-mix and ready-to-drink formats, again thanks to GLP-1. We know that nutritional sustenance is vital for GLP-1 users but that their appetites are supressed, so clear protein beverages allow users to hit macros without the filling sensation of thick protein shakes.

Gold Standard Nutrition and Huel food pots deliver calorie control and portion size in a health-first way.

The third R: renaissance

Case study
Creatine

Creatine is the perfect example of an ingredient that's experiencing a renaissance because it hasn't changed, at all. It's doing what it's always done – the difference is that people are realising its potential and tapping into its lesser known benefits. It's no longer only for gym-goers, it's now for women or people looking to support their brain health.

Creatine's renaissance is also driven by new formats. In addition to the 3,000+ creatine products outlined in figure 1 below, we're also tracking 124 creatine gummies, while creatine yoghurts and coffees are quickly positioning the ingredient as a daily essential.

Category	Products	Competitor Branded	High Dose	Low/Unknown Dose
Creatine	(2,149)	479	2,084	
Creatine Plus	(61)	4	18	42
Electrolyte	(20)	5	5	15
Pre Workout	(569)	92	128	418
Protein Bar	(13)	3	5	8
Protein Powder	(239)	33	72	160
Total		616	2,312	643

3,051 Products

Figure 1. A creatine product landscape showing the number of products within each category that contain either branded creatine, a high dose of creatine or a low dose of creatine. Data: Nutrition Integrated 2025.

Health is a habit

Becoming part of a consumers' daily routine is harder than it sounds. Habits take time to form and supplements can easily be forgotten, left on the side in the best of intentions. But what if the habit already exists? Then the innovation opportunity shifts from building entirely new routines to enhancing and boosting existing ones.

Case study
Hydration

The reason hydration has been such a success is because it taps into a habit that already exists. Everyone needs water and if a simple sachet of electrolytes makes it better for you, then why wouldn't you add them?

Waterboy does an amazing job at framing hydration for three use cases: daily hydration, hydration for workouts, and weekend recovery.

DryWater enhances the hydration habit beyond electrolytes and differentiates based on the latest buzz around cellular hydration.

Health is a habit

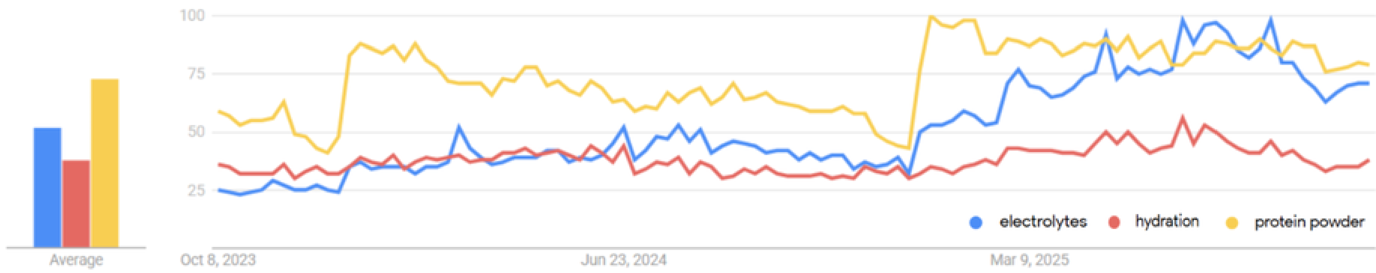


Figure 2. Google Trends data showing how interest in the terms 'protein powder', ‘electrolytes’, and ‘hydration’ have changed over time in the UK. The values represent relative, not absolute, search popularity on a scale from 0 to 100. Each term is measured against its own peak search volume. An upward trend indicates growing interest relative to its peak, while a downward trend reflects a decline in comparative search activity.

Format evolution

We’ve had electrolytes for a long time, more often than not in tablet or powder form. But stick packs and subscription models have revolutionised the category, and we're seeing a significant amount of products using stick packs beyond hydration. Why? Because they’re easy-to-remember, easy-to-take, perfect for on-the-go convenient hydration, and very Instagrammable.

Stick packs for hydration, daily greens, creatine and collagen.

A coffee ritual

Coffee is much more than a daily habit; it's a ritual, a non-negotiable for huge swathes of the population and subsequently, it's where nutrition has pinned its hopes. From MCTs and the days of Bulletproof to collagen, electrolytes, creatine, mushrooms and now protein, making coffee a perfect partner is a surefire way to embed an innovation.

Case study
Protein coffee

Coffee is huge, protein is huge, inevitably we're seeing them come together. It's *Health is a Habit*, but it's also so much more than that because for coffee lovers, it's deeply ritualistic. It's social, habitual, and emotional, and that makes it an ideal format for innovation.

We're seeing two main directions emerge: coffee as a drink enhanced with protein, vitamins, or superfoods, and coffee as a flavour and functional cue, where caffeine and roasted bean extracts are used in other categories such as bars and powders.

Manufacturers are also beginning to differentiate on bean provenance, roast profiles, and specific caffeine content, aligning with the premiumisation trends seen in the broader coffee market.

Commodity protein or lifestyle product?
Bulk's iced latte whey protein coffee (17g protein per serve) retails at around £8 more per kilo than its iced latte flavour pure whey protein (22g protein per serve). "Made with Brazilian roasted beans", this price premium reflects the added value of coffee's experiential positioning, shifting it from a commodity protein to a lifestyle product.

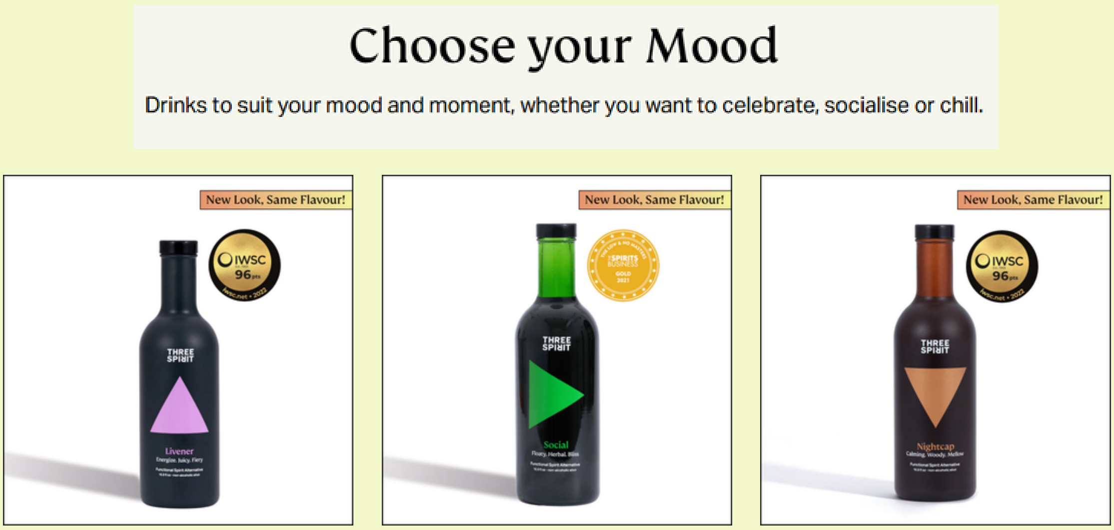
Brands like Soylent and Premier Protein are blending caffeine with protein to create hybrid beverages that go beyond refreshment to deliver sustained energy and satiety.

The buzz without the booze

As younger generations take a different approach to alcohol, what began as low and no alcohol alternatives has become something much bigger with consumers searching for the same sense of buzz, calm or connection, minus the alcohol. It's no longer about simply offering alternatives to alcohol, it's about redefining what it means to drink.

There's a real generational distinction here. For middle-aged and older generations that grew up with a strong relationship with alcohol, choosing a low or no alcohol drink means choosing an alcohol-free beer or wine. But for younger generations that aren't drinking as much, any drink goes. Really, there is no difference between a low or no alcohol drink and a functional or soft drink.

So what are they drinking? The reality is: lots of different things. The buzz without the booze is about functional drinks that still give you the celebratory, cherish the moment scenario.

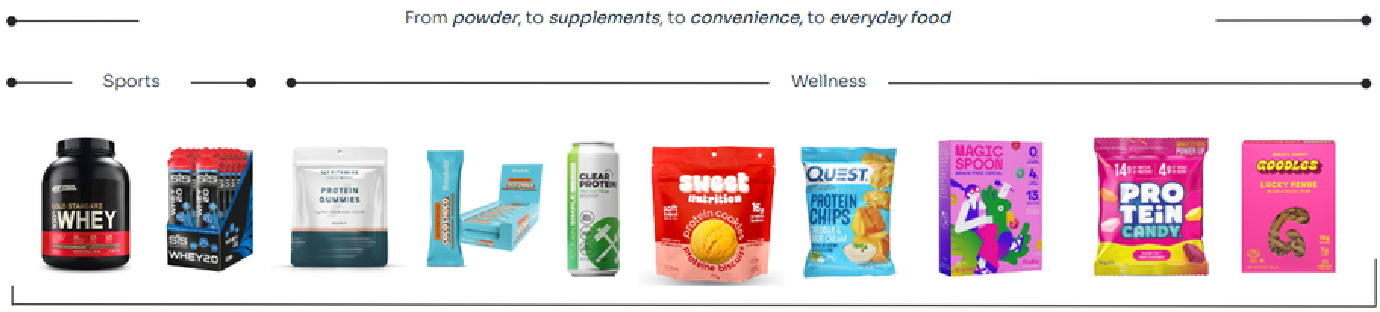


Three Spirit's "functional spirit alternatives". Livener - energise, juicy, firey. Social - floaty, herbal, bliss. Nightcap - calming, woody, mellow.

Better for you everything

Protein has been a buzzword – and buzz ingredient – for longer than anyone expected. It's proliferated in every possible format and aisle, becoming a surrogate for health itself. In doing so, it's set the precedent for better for you everything and created a blueprint that other functional ingredients are already starting to follow.

The proliferation of protein



Case study
Protein confectionery

It started with protein bars, which quickly evolved into 'better-for-you' chocolate bars. From there, the category has continued to stretch its boundaries and moved beyond simple low sugar health claims.

We're seeing confectionery enhanced with vitamins, minerals, nootropics, and mood-supporting ingredients; chocolate reframed as a vehicle for wellness with premium offerings now targeting specific outcomes such as energy or sleep.

There are no rules anymore: Sprinkle Bites protein cake sprinkles, containing 5g protein per 17g sachet.

Function *and* experience

Function or experience? It's a difficult balancing act and consumers want both. Products need to have a benefit but in order to drive broader adoption, repeat purchase and brand loyalty, consumption must be memorable. What's inside the product is no longer enough to ensure success, it's about the moment it creates.

As we saw with better-for-you confectionery, it's an evolution that reflects a broader consumer desire to integrate functionality into familiar, enjoyable formats. The bar or chocolate piece becomes more than a treat, it's a small, daily act of self-care, bridging the gap between indulgence and intention.

Case study
Protein bars

Protein bars remain one of the most established formats in active and functional nutrition. The baseline expectations are clear: a meaningful dose of protein and low sugar content.

However, these formulation requirements inevitably influence taste and texture – a long-standing challenge for brands in this category. But the latest wave of innovation shows how some brands are beginning to break the mould.

Grenade
Grenade continues to represent the classic protein bar proposition – 20g of protein and just 1.8g of sugar – a benchmark for performance and compliance with traditional nutritional targets.

MyProtein
MyProtein appears to be broadening the definition of what a protein bar should and can be. Its Delicious Bar explicitly positions itself as "a rival to traditional chocolate bars with added protein", offering 16g of protein and 6.5g of sugar. The message is clear: taste first, function second, a reframing that brings protein into the mainstream indulgence space.

At the other end of the spectrum, its Toffee Crunch Bar contains 4.4g of protein, 1.8g of sugar, and 6.8g of fibre (compared to just 2g in the Delicious Bar). Marketed as "the perfect treat whenever you're craving something sweet", it emphasises calorie control and fibre intake over protein content.

Built Bar
Built Bar is redefining the sensory experience altogether. Technically a protein bar, its light, marshmallow-like texture sets it apart from the dense, chewy formats typical of the category.

Ghost
Ghost has gained attention for its Twix-inspired bar, which successfully balances function with familiarity, combining indulgence, nostalgia, and credible nutrition in one product.

Together, these examples illustrate a shift from purely functional benchmarks to experiential differentiation. Today's most successful protein bars don't just deliver macros; they deliver an experience that's memorable, enjoyable, and emotionally resonant.

Reshaping the supply chain

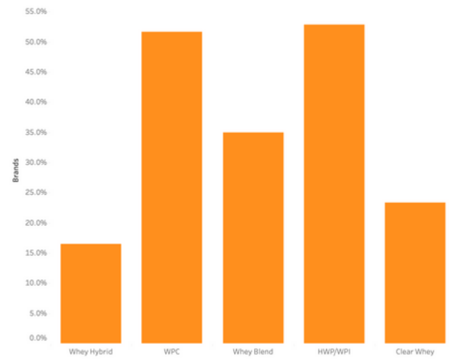
From climate to politics and everything in between, there are lots of supply chain challenges that exist and we're already seeing the supply chain being reshaped as a result. To meet both short-term demand and ensure long-term global food security, new sources of ingredients are needed. Novel approaches that can be decoupled from existing supply chains offer the potential to stabilise supply and avoid price volatility, as well as compelling stories for consumers that add value beyond the ingredient itself.

Case study
Fermentation-derived proteins

Consider figure 3 (right). We can see that, of the 600 European brands analysed, 23% of them offer a clear whey product. In comparison, of 400 US brands, only 9% have a clear whey option. What's interesting is that demand for clear whey is strong, but supply of the ingredient isn't keeping up. Clear whey can only come from the pool of whey protein isolate, and right now there just isn't enough of it. To meet demand, we need more clear whey, but increasing supply could make it less premium.

One potential solution is finding whey from non-animal sources. There are a growing number of next-generation ingredients that have the potential to influence product formulation in the coming years. Of course, there are still caveats around price and supply but if pricing can be managed, developments like precision fermentation could help to stabilise the entire whey protein category.

Europe [~600 brands]



US [~400 brands]

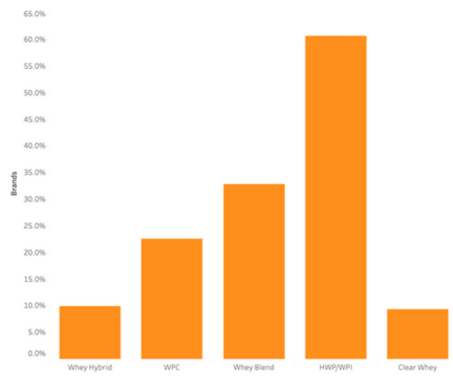


Figure 3. The whey protein architecture distribution in Europe and the US & Canada, based on percentage of brands.

Companies like Vivici and Remilk are creating whey from non-animal sources through precision fermentation, decoupling raw materials from a volatile, commodity-based supply chain to offer advantages including cost control, resilience, and predictability. Meanwhile, The Protein Brewery has used fermentation-based processes to develop a novel protein source, Fermotein®, which contains approximately 50% protein, is high in fibre and naturally rich in spermidine.

The last frontier of identity politics

What started as extreme biohacking among the wealthy has sparked a societal shift: everyday consumers are now focused on longevity and vitality. Age has become just a number, no longer something to be feared as the concept of longevity redefines what it means to age well.

As a result, the longevity space is moving away from the biohacking mindset and toward a more lifestyle-oriented approach. It's an approach that's centred around living in the moment, community, and maximising daily lifestyles with a longer-term view in mind. For example, incorporating strength training and squats in midlife to be strong in the moment, but also with a view to being able to get out of a chair aged 80.

This movement reflects a democratisation of the longevity narrative. While there is still strong interest in products that support cellular health and address the hallmarks of ageing, many of them come with a price tag that makes them inaccessible for the majority of consumers. Instead, the broader and more accessible expression of longevity we're seeing is celebrating everyday performance, vitality, and resilience.

Case study
Longevity bars

The idea that longevity is for everyone, regardless of age, is already beginning to manifest in product innovation. Take the NOVOS bar, for example, which has "precision-formulated with up to 20 longevity-enhancing ingredients for total-body support". Developed in collaboration with a renowned longevity dietitian and a chef from the three-Michelin-starred French Laundry restaurant, this blend of scientific credibility and culinary sophistication highlights how the longevity trend is evolving beyond function alone, toward products that combine efficacy, enjoyment, and aspiration.

At $4 a bar the NOVOS bar is still premium, but significantly more affordable than a lot of the longevity products on the market.

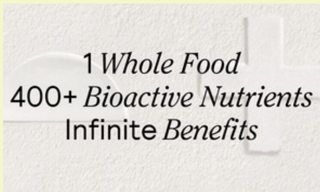
Bang for buck

As wellness expands so too does the list of supplements competing for attention. But there's a limit to what we can consume and how much we're willing to spend. To win, brands must offer more complete solutions if they're to become the go-to product when consumers ask themselves: if I only take one supplement today, what will it be?

Across the board, the underlying message is value. Consumers are looking for products that deliver more – more benefits, more function, more convenience – for the same spend.

Case study
Ingredients mash ups

We're seeing a rise in ingredient mash-ups to deliver multiple benefits in one product. Harlo's electrolytes, collagen & creatine mix combines hydration, recovery, and performance into one offering, while IVB Wellness Labs pairs creatine with magnesium bisglycinate to merge muscle and cognitive support. But innovation doesn't always have to come from multi-ingredient blends. Sometimes, a single multifunctional ingredient can deliver the same perceived value and versatility. Creatine on its own, for instance, is increasingly being positioned as a single compound with broad health and performance relevance.



Armra Colostrum, a whole-food ingredient boasting over 400 bioactives and claiming 1,000 health benefits.

Ingredient / category mash-up with Harlo and IVB Wellness Labs.

Rescue remedies

Not everything in life goes to plan; it's gritty, hard work and the majority of us live it on the edge. For many people, supplements aren't about helping them be their best selves, but simply a marginally better version of themselves. From hangovers to burnout and everything in between, we're all searching for a little rescue in one way or another.

With 21% of the EU population experiencing mild to moderate depressive symptoms, and widespread reports of fatigue across demographics, from menopause to mental load, it's clear that many consumers are seeking support rather than perfection.

The future of nutrition may not sit at either extreme of being either proactive or reactive, but in the middle ground – helping proactive consumers react to the challenges of modern life. The message is simple but powerful: life isn't perfect, but we can help you feel better in the moment.

We Are Regular embodies this mindset with refreshingly honest communication, positioning its £1.60 Perfect Poo product as a simple, relatable solution to a universal problem. Its messaging acknowledges discomfort, empathy, and reality: "We've been there. It's not glamorous, but we can help."

AWKN was created by sisters who wanted to help people enjoy nights out while still being productive the next day. It's a perfect example of rescue nutrition in action: wellness for real life, not an idealised version of it.

So what next?

The trends we've shared aren't meant to be taken literally; they're a starting point, there to encourage you to think differently. The real value lies in the insights they reveal: what's changing, what's resonating with consumers, and where opportunities for evolution exist. Your challenge now is to interpret these trends through your own lens. Maybe it inspires a new product format, a fresh ritual, or a novel way to deliver functional ingredients. Maybe it sparks an idea in an entirely unexpected category. The goal isn't to copy, but to adapt, experiment, and push boundaries to find what fits best for your brand and consumers.

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