

# Will you still feed me, *when I'm 64?*

By Jeanne Turner



Busy redefining the term “senior years,” baby boomers seek foods and ingredients that will help them maintain a healthy, active lifestyle.

Every day, 11,000 baby boomers turn 50, and many thousands more are reaching retirement age. However, this generation anticipates experiencing a different style of retirement than their parents before them. As that tidal wave of marketing influence, the baby boom generation, starts to reach age 65 and older, food processors and manufacturers need to consider the nutritional and health needs of an aging population that is redefining the “senior years.”

Key terms for consideration when developing new products are “health” and “vitality.” Baby boomers are concerned with these particular issues more than any other previous generation<sup>1</sup> yet many have ignored good health messages for years, hoping that science and medicine would fill in for their neglect.<sup>2</sup>

While wise marketers will avoid geriatric profiling, there are health concerns common to all boomers as they face the task of trying to maintain a healthy, youthful outlook in a body that is feeling the effects of time.

### **Keeping Up Appearances**

As we age, our bodies require fewer calories to maintain an ideal body weight. This often means searching for nutrient-rich foods that will supply the essential vitamins and minerals recommended for a healthy balance, without contributing an excess amount of calories. Instead of foods

with ‘empty’ calories, the goal is to find foods that contribute to satiety, to help stave off hunger pangs and enable the consumer to avoid exceeding their calorie needs.

Sixty percent of consumers ages 45 to 54 say they are “concerned about trying to stay in shape,” but just 12 percent of boomers say they have attained their goals of “adopting a healthy lifestyle,” and fewer than half are doing anything about their weight. Clearly, appearance is important to boomers, and some in this segment are turning to pharmaceuticals, nutraceuticals and better-for-you foods for help.

In the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*<sup>3</sup>, researchers determined that not only did eggs lend a greater sense of satiety than a more carbohydrate-laden breakfast with a similar calorie count, but that calorie intake following the egg breakfast remained lower, not just for the rest of the day, but for the next 36 hours.

In a randomized controlled trial, 160 overweight or obese men and women



American Egg Board  
aeb.org



Add versatility to the list of key terms describing foods to entice baby boomers. Companies can look to breakfast foods for success because as the Mintel report states, “consumers are less likely to ‘compartmentalize’ daily meals.” This means they are eating any type of meal any time of day. These meals are leaning on the nutritional quality of egg ingredients to create well-balanced, healthful meal choices:

Jimmy Dean, a division of Sara Lee Corporation, followed the market indicators and introduced their D-Light version of a traditional breakfast bowl, containing less than half the calories and fat of regular varieties. The product features turkey sausage, scrambled egg whites, potatoes and reduced fat cheese in a microwaveable bowl.

Nikolas’ Kitchen introduced Egg Scramble Lorraine, a Mediterranean-style meal with smoked ham, bacon, and garden vegetables and cooked eggs. The company’s Egg Scramble Florentine serves up spinach and feta cheese in a single-serve microwaveable bowl for only 150 calories.

Perfectly portable, Weight Watchers Smart Ones Morning Express introduced Canadian Style Bacon English Muffin Sandwiches with egg and cheese, prepared in two minutes in the microwave and containing only 210 calories and 6g of fat. Nestle also is pursuing the hand-held market with a Hot Pockets Biscuits Buttermilk Biscuit Crust with Bacon, Egg and Cheese, touted as a good natural source of protein and calcium. The product label highlights its 0g trans fat content.

Source: Mintel Global New Products Database

were divided into two groups, one of which ate a breakfast including two eggs, while the other consumed a bagel breakfast supplying the same amount of calories and weight mass.<sup>4</sup>

Compared to those on the bagel breakfast, egg eaters:

- Lost almost twice as much weight—egg eaters lost an average of 6.0 pounds compared to bagel eaters’ 3.5-pound loss.
- Had an 83% greater decrease in waist circumference.
- Reported greater improvements in energy and less fatigue.
- Daily egg consumption did not increase blood lipid levels compared with the bagel group and did not increase measures of risk for heart disease or stroke.

The researchers findings that blood lipids were not impacted during the two-month study, added to the body of research that concludes that healthy adults can enjoy eggs without significantly impacting their risk of heart disease.

### Cardiovascular Health

Heart health is important at any age. One major risk factor for experiencing a heart attack that cannot be helped is age—baby boomers are increasingly subject to risk of heart attack with every passing year. A major risk factor they can monitor is their blood cholesterol levels. And the good news is that a growing body of sound scientific research proves that the cholesterol myth surrounding egg consumption is just that—a myth.

A Harvard School of Public Health<sup>5</sup> study found no relationship between egg consumption and cardiovascular disease in a population of over 117,000 nurses and health professionals followed for eight to fourteen years. There was

no difference in heart disease relative risk between those who consumed fewer than one egg a week and those who ate more than one egg a day.

Not only have studies shown that eggs do not significantly affect cholesterol levels in most individuals, but the latest research published in August of 2008 in *The European Journal of Nutrition*<sup>6</sup> suggests that eating whole eggs may actually result in significant improvement in one’s blood lipid (cholesterol) profile, even in persons whose cholesterol levels rise when eating cholesterol-rich foods.

The research conducted at the University of Surrey in England showed that study participants who ate two eggs per day while on a calorie-restricted diet not only lost weight, but also reduced their blood cholesterol levels.

The research team headed by Dr Bruce Griffin, fed two eggs per day to overweight but otherwise healthy volunteers for 12 weeks while they simultaneously followed a reduced-calorie diet prescribed by the British Heart Foundation (BHF), normally restricting egg intake to 3-4 per week. A control group followed the same BHF diet but cut out eggs altogether.

Both groups lost between 3 to 4kg (7-9lbs) in weight and saw a fall in the average level of blood cholesterol, demonstrating that the egg consumption had no ill effect on blood cholesterol levels.

### Muscle Tone

At about age 50 our metabolism slows down and we are subject to sarcopenia, or muscle wasting. The less muscle we have, the less energy we burn. Proper nutrient selection accompanied by exercise can help replenish muscle mass and provide energy without contributing excess calories.

According to Marcia Greenblum, MS, RD, of the Egg Nutrition Center, “Most people would be surprised to learn the importance of breakfast for maintaining and building muscle tissue. Current research shows that an





### Panini

Hand-held sandwiches such as a panini can supply a complete and nutritious meal to consumers on the go.

adequate amount of good, high quality protein for breakfast helps start the process of muscle synthesis. If you wait until dinner for protein intake, it is likely that muscle tissue will be lost during the day.”

Quantity and quality should go hand in hand, and it is no secret that protein quality differs among ingredient choices. Eggs contain all nine essential amino acids, and whole egg protein has a biological value of 93.7 on a 100-point scale. The essential amino acid composition of egg protein is similar to the human body’s requirement, allowing the body to use the protein more efficiently for growth. “There is no reason why one should become fragile as we age,” said Greenblum, “if we eat the right foods and exercise regularly.”

### Eye Health

Two studies published in the October 2006 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition*<sup>7</sup> found that eating an egg a day can raise levels of lutein and

zeaxanthin in the blood. Lutein and zeaxanthin are the only two carotenoids that are deposited and stored in the retina of the eye, and studies show that these nutrients may reduce the risk of age-related macular degeneration (AMD). AMD is the leading cause of blindness in people older than 50 and affects more than 10 million Americans.

Other studies show that lutein prevents and to some extent can reverse vision loss. In a Harvard University<sup>8</sup> based study, women with diets high in lutein and zeaxanthin experienced a 22% reduced risk of cataracts, while men reduced their risk by 19 percent.

The *Journal of Nutrition* further reports that lutein is best absorbed from egg yolk—not lutein supplements or richer sources such as spinach. Egg yolks offer a highly bioavailable source, and their consumption increases lutein concentrations in the blood more effectively than other sources.

### Breast Cancer

Choline, an essential nutrient found in foods such as eggs, can help significantly reduce the risk of breast cancer, according to a study supported by a grant from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), published in 2008 in *The FASEB Journal*.<sup>9</sup> The study, which followed more than

3,000 adult women, found that the risk of developing breast cancer was 24 percent lower among women with the highest intake of choline compared to those with the lowest intake.

Only ten percent of Americans currently meet the level of adequate intake for choline. According to the Institute of Medicine, adequate choline intake is 550 mg per day for men and breastfeeding women, 425 mg for women and 450 mg for pregnant women. One egg contains 125.5 mg of choline, concentrated in the egg yolk and supplying a quarter of the recommended daily requirement, qualifying as an “excellent” source of this essential nutrient. In addition to helping to reduce breast cancer risk, choline is important for proper liver, brain and nerve function.

According to Greenblum, “People often miss the fact that if they throw out a yolk they’re losing 40% of the protein, not to mention other essential vitamins and minerals such as choline, lutein and zeaxanthin. While both the white and the yolk have differing functional properties,” she continued, “it is the entire egg that supplies the amino acid profile and additional vitamins



### Huevos Picada

Eggs contain readily bioavailable protein that helps promote satiety. Egg products also are highly functional in formulation and offer a valuable combination of great taste nutrition.

and minerals that make up this amazing ingredient.”

### Better For You and Convenient, Too

The question remains, what type of formulation might achieve the greatest success when targeting the health needs of the special population segment? A survey conducted by the AARP in Washington, DC and Roper Starch Worldwide, New York, New York,

great taste creates a win-win for this market and the product manufacturer.

Both of these trends are affecting the breakfast segment, according to Mintel, Inc., Chicago, Illinois, a leading market research company. And among mealtime segments the breakfast food market grew 13% at current prices from 2003-2008, with eggs experiencing a 48% sales increase in this same time period. This might come as a bit of a

stoplight. The Mintel report says, “Portability has emerged as a key marketing claim in breakfast foods.”

Versatility, portability, health and vitality—terms that describe the lifestyle baby boomers wish to, and *can* achieve, given the right foods. Manufacturers simply need to turn to the right ingredients, such as eggs, to help this important market segment reach their goals. ●



### Eggs Monterey

The breakfast segment can help build vital market share. The right protein breakfast also helps consumers rebuild muscle mass lost during exercise or vigorous activity.

found that many boomers expect to continue working during their retirement years, and to live longer and more self-indulgently than their parents' generation. They plan on an active lifestyle, so marketers can count on the grab-and-go mentality towards food continuing. A product that offers convenience and portability plus healthy benefits and

## Study participants who ate two eggs per day while on a calorie restricted diet not only lost weight, but also reduced their blood cholesterol levels.

surprise with factors such as lengthy commutes and the corresponding a.m. time crunch working against breakfast. However, this is where inventive marketers use better-for-you ingredients to make more convenient, portable foods.

As the Mintel study, “Breakfast Foods, The Market, U.S., November, 2008” notes, “Makers and marketers of breakfast foods are innovating with better-for-you options and convenient solutions that offer ease of use and portability—segments which dually support these propositions are illustrating the most growth.”

Consumers are torn between time and nutrition. Nearly a quarter of respondents to the study indicated they are interested in more on-the-go breakfast foods, and 19% say they are too busy to eat a sit-down meal. High quality ingredients that create products that satisfy and please the palate are in high demand—especially if they can be consumed at the nearest

<sup>1</sup>IRI Baby Boomers: One Size Does Not Fit All

<sup>2</sup>“Boomers’ Health Mistakes Can Add Up Later,” *Forbes*, Jan. 19, 2007

<sup>3</sup>Vander Wal, J. et al, Short-term effect of eggs on satiety in overweight and obese subjects, *J Am Coll Nutr*, 2005, Volume 24, No. 6, 510-515.

<sup>4</sup>Dhurandhar, N, Vander Wal J, Egg breakfast enhances weight loss, *The FASEB Journal*, 2007; 21:538.1

<sup>5</sup>Hu FB, Stampfer MJ, Rimm EB, et al. A prospective study of egg consumption and risk of cardiovascular disease in men and women. *JAMA* 1999;281:1387-1394.

<sup>6</sup>Harman N, Leeds R, Griffin H. Increased dietary cholesterol does not increase plasma low density lipoprotein when accompanied by an energy-restricted diet and weight loss. *Eur J Nutr*, 2008, 47(6): 287-293.

<sup>7</sup>Goodrow E. et al, Consumption of one egg per day increases serum lutein and zeaxanthin concentrations in older adults without altering serum lipid and lipoprotein cholesterol concentrations, *J. Nutr.* 2006, 136:2519-2524.

<sup>8</sup>Mares-Perlman J, Millen A, Ficek T, Hankinson S, The body of evidence to support a protective role for lutein and zeaxanthin in delaying chronic disease. Overview. *J. Nutr.* 2002, 132:518S-524S.

<sup>9</sup>Xu X, et al, Choline metabolism and risk of breast cancer in a population-based study, *The FASEB Journal*, published in final edited form as: *FASEB J.* 2008 June ; 22(6): 2045-2052.