

Are Chinese youngsters eating healthier these days ?

Check their plates

When you open some of the most popular Chinese lifestyle-sharing apps such as Xiaohongshu or Weibo, it is not uncommon to see many influencers proudly parading their lifestyles and sharing their daily recipes, most of which are diet-oriented, sugar-free or non-fat.

Along with the trendy healthy lifestyle, the scale of the Chinese light food market exceeded 100 billion yuan (US\$14 billion) in 2022, accounting for about 10 percent of the total catering revenue in five years, according to data from Meituan Takeout, the Chinese on-demand food delivery service titan.

As a health trend category, light food undoubtedly has certain broad prospects. No wonder Subway, the world's leading sandwich chain, announced that it would open almost 4,000 new stores across the Chinese mainland over the next 20 years.

“Healthy” as a trend

“To manage my sugar intake, I have cut down on sweet milk tea and sweet treats from my diet,” Miss Xu, an office lady aged 27, told Xinhua news



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Wesley Jiang

Co-host of Sugar Control Lab

agency about her diet management. “Diet control makes me feel healthy.”

Xu is not alone. In 2022, approximately 65.58 percent of urban youth actively follow their health condition and information on health and wellness. In contrast, only 0.6 percent of urban youth have little care of their own health status, demonstrating a strong interest in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, according to a research conducted by Xinhua.

Chinese youngsters have taken diet as an important factor in maintaining health. Youngsters have increasingly dumped their obsession with sweetness and fat while embracing low-calorie cuisines and beverages. Products like sugar-free tea and light food met their demand, thereby going viral.

Sales of a newly launched sugar-free drink unleashed by Chinese tea beverage brand Naixue leaped by over 200 percent year on year in 2022, accounting for more than 40 percent of the brand's total bottled tea.

“Healthy, low calories and low sugar are the future trends of new-style tea drinks,” said Peng Xin, the founder of Naixue.

The growing trend of individuals striving for a healthier lifestyle is also evident in the light food market. In the first half of 2023, there were over 2,370 newly registered companies among the existing “light food” related enterprises, rising by 8.8 percent from a year earlier, according to statistics from Tianyancha, a corporate information provider.

“Healthy” as a demand

More than just a culinary trend, the flourishing healthy diet market reflects profound shifts in Chinese lifestyles and dietary choices. This evolution in dietary habits mirrors the country's economic ascent, transitioning from focusing on mere sustenance to emphasizing quality nutrition.

Benefiting from GDP growth, the Chinese have shifted from “eating full” to “eating well.” Chinese youngsters' demand has become prominent regarding the strong health self-consciousness.

The surging awareness of one's health condition can also be traced back to health issues, with a significant portion of adults and children troubled by overweight and obesity issues in recent years.

Therefore, the concept of “eating healthy” has taken center stage, igniting influencers' passion to advocate healthier lifestyles. Social platforms have become hubs for relevant information exchanges and also a generator.



Influencer Wesley Jiang and his friend Simon Wu share an account on Xiaohongshu called Simon and Wes' Sugar Control Lab with over 30,000 followers.

Their content focused on diet testing — a topic of interest among young people — including intermittent energy restriction, sugar control and the ketogenic diet.

“Knowledge from the internet not only gives scientific awareness but also adds common sense,” said Jiang. “We can see that the public awareness and health consciousness is surging. It's a good thing.”

As opinion-sharers themselves, Wu and Jiang also underlined the necessity for critical scrutiny amid the narrative around healthy diets.

The health-conscious craze is also partially attributable to societal pressures, especially for young women, to conform to the beauty standards, warned the influencer. Despite their rejection of such norms on Chinese social media, the pressure of “beauty duty” persists, compelling young people to adopt healthy diets and take on a more attractive appearance.

The Chinese government regards the health of its citizens as a significant indicator of the country's prosperity and has implemented policies to enhance it.

The government has adopted an all-encompassing approach to food. It is devoted to building a diversified food supply system while strengthening

targeted science popularization and guiding the public to adjust their eating habits, developing foods with higher nutrient density for different demographic groups and their diversified health needs.

“Healthy” as a brand

The market for lifestyle products in the country has been gaining ground with the consumption of more healthy food products.

Miles Hurrell, CEO of New Zealand's dairy giant Fonterra, saw great prospects in China's health-conscious market.

Bringing more new products into the market, Hurrell is glad to see that “more customers in China are talking about innovation, sustainability, and nutrition.”

“We've seen growth in nutritional products. And health and wellness is a significant category that has huge upside where we're excited,” Hurrell said, referring to a remarkable growth in the sales of Fonterra's cheese products in the Chinese market.

“I'm really excited about what this market has to offer, and the medium- to long-term prospects are still great,” Hurrell told Xinhua, emphasizing “the positive nature of the Chinese economy.”

(Xinhua)