



## SLIMMING CHANCE: NUTRITION BARS FOR WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

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The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 1.5 billion adults aged 20 and older are overweight worldwide. As if that weren't anxiety-inducing enough, more than 200 million men and nearly 300 million women among them also qualify as obese. So profound is this global epidemic of overweight and obesity that it's spawned its own regrettable neologism: globesity.

So it should come as no surprise that research firm Euromonitor, Chicago, pegged the 2009 market for weight-management foods, beverages and supplements at \$3.64 billion in the United States and \$1.3 billion in Europe. To Henk Jan Neerhof, manager of product development, VSI, Leerdam, The Netherlands, a non-branded bar manufacturer, the connection is plain as day. "As long as the world is gripped by globesity," he says, "the demand for weight-management tools will continue to rise."

One of the most popular of those tools is the "weight-loss" or "weight-control" bar, which, Neerhof says, "is a handy format for aiding slimming, as well as an ideal and convenient way to provide nutrition."

But no bar can transform a consumer's relationship with food and exercise—the true route to a healthy weight—on its own. And if a weight-loss bar is little more than a fortified confection, it's doomed from the start. Only when formulated with an eye to delivering targeted nutrition and satisfaction can a "slimming" bar play its part in helping consumers do just that.

### Energy equation

Like all bars, weight-loss bars fall into several format themes: granola, confectionery-type, cookie, wafer and so on. But no matter the style, what you put into your bar will depend on what you want to get out of it.

According to Leslie J. Bonci, MPH, RD, CSSD, LDN, director of sports nutrition, University of Pittsburgh Medical Center for Sports Medicine, Pennsylvania, and a nutrition consultant to the Cherry Marketing Institute, Lansing, MI, the first question any formulator should ask is: "What are you going to use the bar for? What role is it playing?" Is it a snack? A meal replacement? A tool for post-exercise feeding? The answer, she says, will "govern the composition of that bar, including the calorie level."

In the case of a self-proclaimed weight-loss bar, consumers will apparently use it to lose weight. But that again raises the question of whether a bar—or any caloric food—can promote weight loss. Calories, after all, are what weight is made of. And all else being equal, eating more of them will tip the scales in the wrong direction.

But all else may not be equal. "A bar could help you lose weight if you're using it as a substitute for something else," Bonci says. "There has to be some kind of swap-out." A meal-replacement bar that loads a dinner's-worth of energy into one wrapper won't eliminate pounds if you eat it in addition to the meal it was supposed to replace. Then again, subbing one of your three squares with a 100-calorie snack bar may prove counterproductive, too, because "you're going to get hungry really soon after the bar's done in three bites," she says.

Thus, less isn't always more in weight-loss formulation. "And by the same token," Bonci continues, "more is not always best when we're trying to get the calories right, either." A well-formulated weight-loss bar will straddle the middle ground between light snack and meal replacement. And while opinion on the ideal calorie content varies, a total in the 200 to 250 kcal range—"max," she says—is reasonable in a 2- to 2.5-oz. product.

### **On balance**

Once you've settled on the calorie target, you have to determine where those calories will come from. Here—as elsewhere in weight-management formulation—balance is key. The bar "can't be just carb, just protein or just fat," Bonci says. She suggests that our 2- to 2.5-oz. bar might pack in 10 grams of protein, as many as 8 to 10 grams of fat (perhaps from nuts or nut butters) and "the rest will be from your carbohydrate component" of sweeteners, possibly some dried fruits and usually "a kind of grain base, whether it's oats or rice crisps or whatever."

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