

Make Sure Your Smoothie Bar Is Stocked for Success

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Maybe your members want a fresh-squeezed juice before a yoga session. Or they are looking for a protein shake to add some bulk. A smoothie or juice bar in your fitness facility provides a convenient place for members to refuel and rehydrate before getting back to their busy lives. But how do you make sure you are stocking the right products that make the most sense for their healthy lifestyles?

It all comes down to knowing your client base and being able to meet their nutrition goals, says Chris Cuvelier, founder and CEO of Zola, a juice company. With the right mix of products, fitness facilities can provide clients with good nutrition that supports a variety of dietary needs.

Before founding Zola, Cuvelier worked as a consultant to help companies open their own smoothie/juice bars. He found that three main client groups tend to use smoothie/juice bars: the hard-core athlete who needs lots of protein to provide bulk, the purist who shops for whole and natural foods, and the mainstream healthy person who is looking to improve his or her lifestyle.

"You might have someone who's trying to bulk up and wants 40 to 50 grams of whey protein," he says. "You might have someone who's doing yoga and wants 15 to 20 grams of protein and wants organic. Having a good range of products is really essential."

At the Body Shop Health Club, Lemoore, CA, clients have a choice of three types of protein powders for their shakes: a muscle-builder with a high-calorie, high-protein blend; a standard protein powder with fewer calories; and a power shake powder with a low-calorie, lower-protein blend.

"It provides our clients with a few choices," says Mike Royer, president of the Body Shop Health Club.

Clients also can choose to add supplements depending on their needs, including Caffeine 101 for energy, Total Multivitamin for essential nutrients, or L-Glutamine for muscle growth and recovery.

People also can order fruit smoothies if they do not want the protein powder, although Royer says most order the protein shakes.

"It's important to have that protein post workout," he says. "We don't do a lot of smoothies, to be honest. If a parent is getting a protein shake, they might buy a smoothie for their child just because it tastes good."

The amount of calories in each of the drinks varies. Clients who are watching their weight may go for a 150-calorie shake with lower carbs, as opposed to a 700-calorie shake that is more appropriate for those who want to gain weight, says Ryan Lipinski, owner of Juiced at the George Brown Sports Club in Clovis, CA.

Although Lipinski says he does not have clear guidelines for calories, he tries to keep most smoothies at or under 300 calories. The staff is trained to ask customers about their dietary needs with questions such as, "When was the last time you ate today?" and "What type of workout did you just do?"

"You want to make sure you're dialed into that specific client ordering a smoothie who might be on a certain number of calories for the day," Lipinski says.

In addition to offering protein, clubs should consider having low-calorie drink options available for people to rehydrate before or after a workout. Along with water, clubs can offer drinks such as coconut water and fresh squeezed juices. Royer recommends against having sodas but says that energy drink options are often a popular choice for the smoothie/juice bar crowd.

For the purists and mainstream healthy clients, Cuvelier suggests having a fresh-squeezed juice bar that blends raw fruits and vegetables, such as apples, carrots and kale, in a ready-to-make format. Whether you use fresh ingredients or purees for your juices and smoothies may depend on the space and investment that your club is able to handle.

"I think the bar is set pretty high," Cuvelier says. "You've got juice bars blending in fresh fruit and doing things that are made-to-order, and I think customers appreciate that level of quality if they can get it."

Another consideration is whether you want to use organic ingredients to appeal to the purist and mainstream audiences.

"I think the organic trend is going to get bigger and bigger," Cuvelier says. "If someone has the right consumer base, it can be an important benefit or advantage."

However, if your audience is mostly hard-core and you are offering protein shakes rather than juices, you may not need to spend the extra money to go organic.

"If you're in Paleo and trying to do all-natural foods, you're not doing protein smoothies anyway," Lipinski says.

One thing that all clients can benefit from is a selection of healthy foods. Lipinski suggests offering high-quality protein snacks, such as protein bars, high-protein jerky or protein chips—anything that can fit as a snack in clients' meal plans. Depending on how much you want to offer, you also can do turkey wraps, salads and other light, healthy meals.

Often, the mainstream consumer is looking for something that is not only good for them but tastes a little decadent, Cuvelier says. That might be a package of dark chocolate acai or a healthy cookie.

"This isn't the hard-core consumer or the purist, but it's that mainstream consumer that's looking for a little treat after they get done with a workout," he says.

No matter whether their juice bars include protein smoothies, juices, snacks or all of the above, owners should talk with their trainers and dieticians to make sure the smoothie/juice bar is offering the right kinds of foods for their clients. When Lipinski first opened in 2011, he met with the trainers to show them the menu, including the ingredients and calorie counts, to get their suggestions.

By talking to your staff about the food selection, you can ensure that you are providing a real health benefit for clients.

"I would sit down with my trainers and say, 'OK, what are you guys recommending that your clients do nutritionally?' and then I would build a menu around that," Cuvelier says. "If the club does a great job of building a juice bar around the clients' needs, it's a win-win for the trainers where they feel like they're being authentic and true to what they believe."

In addition, by including the trainers' suggestions, club operators will feel more comfortable recommending items from the smoothie/juice bar, depending on what type of workouts their members are doing. And they will be able to tie it into their members' individual diet and exercise programs.

"It's all about the members," Lipinski says. "We're here to make sure they get results."

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