

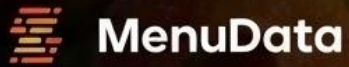
# MenuData 2026 Trends

Across Foodservice, Food &  
Beverage Trends



# Trends

- ✓ Next-Gen Textures
- ✓ Hyper Nostalgia
- ✓ Return of Animal Fats
- ✓ GLP-1 Lifestyle Shift
- ✓ Rise of All Day Breakfast
- ✓ Gen-Z Beverage Culture
- ✓ Global Flavor Pollination
- ✓ Pistachio Everything
- ✓ Functional Energy 2.0
- ✓ Better-For-You Indulgence



# Next-Gen Texture Play: The Evolution of Multisensory Eating

How QSR, Retail & Beverage Brands are  
Capturing Consumers Through Mouthfeel  
Innovation

# Next-Gen Textures: Gen Z & Millennials Leading the Charge

Younger demographics are leading the push for texture-driven innovation.

75% of Gen Z and 80% of Millennials rate texture as just as important as flavor, with mouthfeel and sensory experience increasingly shaping their food cravings and purchase decisions.

*“Chewy textures saw strong momentum, with menu penetration rising 46% in 2025 versus the previous year”*

- MenuData

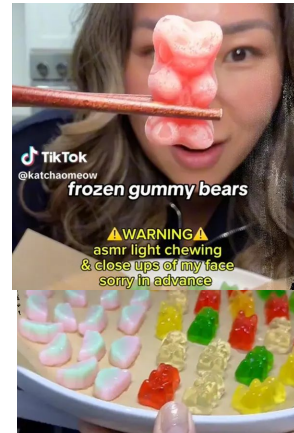


**72% of consumers would switch brands if texture failed to meet expectations, elevating mouthfeel from a feature to a loyalty driver**



Texture-led appeal is evident among Gen Z, who choose gummy candies 60% of the time compared to 50% for millennials, attracted by the products' "squishy" playability

- Mars Wrigley



# QSR Examples – Crispy and Creamy

## Chick-fil-A: Pretzel Cheddar Club Sandwich



- Soft pretzel bun + crispy bacon + melted cheddar + creamy Dijon sauce
- Why It Works: Buttery pretzel exterior contrasts with savory, crunchy bacon and tangy sauce

## KFC: Cherry Pie Poppers



- Bite-sized, crispy-exterior pastries + sweet filling (less messy nugget-style experience)
- Why It Works: Playful texture format; appeals to snackability and shareable size; nostalgic flavor

## Taco Bell: Toasted Cheddar Street Chalupa



- Crispy cheddar-cheese coating + soft tortilla + tender meat + tangy sauce
- Why It Works: Crispy grilled-cheese exterior; inside-outside texture contrast

*"Crispy, a mature and widely used texture, continued to grow with menu penetration up **3.3% year-on-year in 2025"***

- MenuData research

# Beverage Textures – From Drinks to Experiences

## Beyond Traditional Boba: Popping Boba

- Experience: Bite triggers burst, releasing flavor payload with liquid center
- Appeal: Playable, interactive, Instagram worthy



*“Popping emerged as a fast-growing texture, recording a 44% increase in menu penetration in 2025”*

- MenuData



## Cold Foam as a Functional Texture Upgrade

- Starbucks cold foam grew 23% YoY (Q3 2025), becoming a core driver of beverage customization.
- Offered in protein variants (15g protein) and seasonal flavors including Pumpkin, Tiramisu, and Egnog Cream Cold Foam

**“Cold foam saw rapid adoption, with menu penetration surging 78% in 2025, reflecting strong demand momentum”**

- MenuData

# Hyper-Nostalgia: The Evolution of Throwback Culture

How Brands Are Capturing  
Consumers Through Childhood  
Memory & Premium Execution



# Hyper-Nostalgia: The Emotional, Social, and Premium Power of Retro Eats

## Psychological Comfort



Economic uncertainty, geopolitical tension, and social fragmentation drive consumers toward familiar foods. Childhood favorites offer safe, predictable sensory experiences that provide emotional grounding in unstable times.

## Social Currency



Retro products spark conversation and generate shareable content. Aesthetic packaging, unboxing moments, and viral-ready visuals on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube turn nostalgia into a form of social expression and community connection.

## Premium Positioning



Elevated childhood favorites satisfy both emotional nostalgia and modern sophistication. Consumers are willing to pay a premium for high-quality execution on familiar formats, positioning nostalgia as an “affordable luxury.”

## FOMO Mechanics



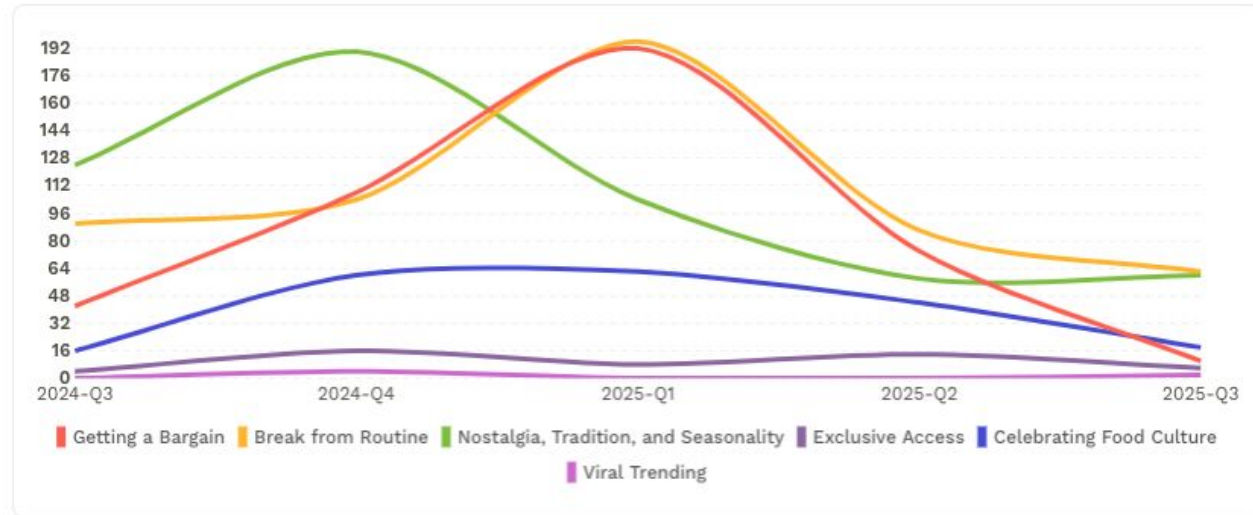
Limited-time availability and scarcity messaging drive urgency, encouraging immediate trials and repeat purchases

## Hyper-Nostalgia: Creating Urgency and Sparking Trial Through Limited-Time Offers

Nostalgia, tradition, and seasonality emerge as one of the strongest early-stage LTO drivers, peaking sharply in late 2024. This aligns with fall and holiday cycles, where familiar flavors, formats, and throwback cues naturally resonate and feel emotionally comforting. While this trend tapered in H1 2025, expect it to gain momentum again during the holiday season, as brands leverage nostalgia-driven LTO offerings to reconnect with consumers through familiar and emotionally resonant experiences.

LTO Driver Trends Over Time

View all



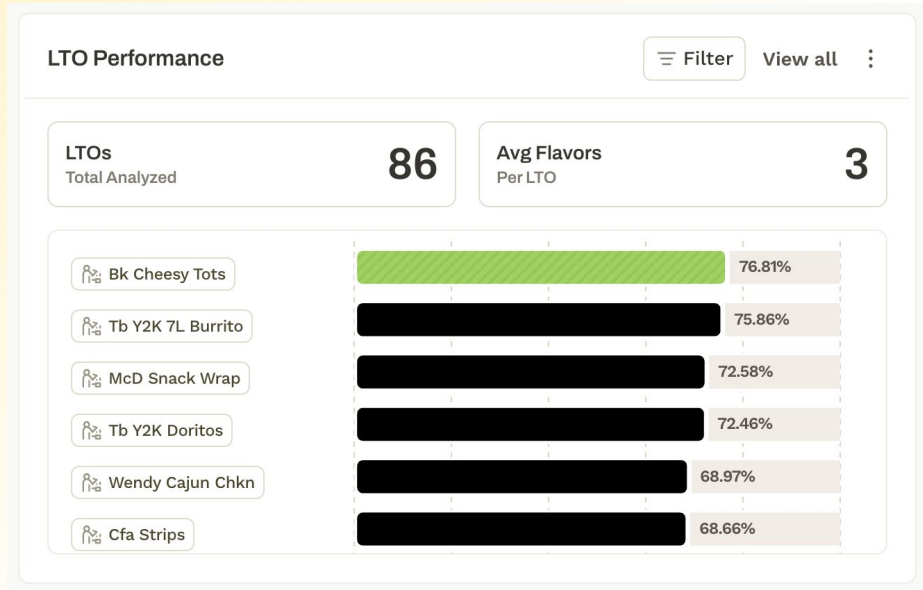
**McDonald's McShaker Fries x Grinch Meal – 90s DIY Fries Return in 2025 as Holiday LTO with Pickle “Grinch Salt”**



Source: MenuData Insights Platform

# Hyper-Nostalgia: Retro Designs Boost LTO Virality

"Leading QSRs launched 139 LTOs this year centered on nostalgia, tradition, and seasonality, with Starbucks emerging as the category leader. Among these, Burger King Cheesy Tots, Taco Bell's Y2K 7L Burrito and Doritos, and McDonald's Snack Wraps were the top-performing items, registering the highest consumer affinity scores"



## Taco Bell Y2K Menu — 2000s Comeback as Event Platform



- Bundles five cult favorites from the 2000s into a single, time-boxed menu, turning individual comebacks into a larger “Y2K era” event
- Uses accessible, sub-\$3 price points to mimic early-2000s value, making the throwback feel authentic and easy to add on to orders.

# Hyper-Nostalgia: How Limited-Time Offers Create Urgency

Limited-time positioning creates urgency and elevates perceived value, justifying higher price points while accelerating trial through FOMO-driven demand



- SpongeBob-themed items inspired by iconic characters, from the Krabby Whopper to the Pineapple Float.
- Pineapple-shaped boxes, SpongeBob crowns, and toys create standout, shareable unboxing moments.
- Taps long-standing fan love for SpongeBob, transforming the movie tie-in into a retro, social-first QSR experience.



**Wendy's Spicy Nuggets – Fan-Led Revival That Turned an LTO into a Permanent Core Menu Icon**



- Relunched nationally on August 2019 as a high-profile LTO, then retained as a permanent menu item due to sustained demand
- Extended into Saucy Nuggets (including spicy variants) showing how a nostalgia-fueled comeback can evolve into a modular flavor platform rather than a one-off promotion



# The Return Of Animal Fats: Ancestral Fats Meet Modern QSRs

How Tallow is Reshaping Consumer Preferences & Competitive Differentiation



# The Return of Animal Fats: How Seed Oil Skepticism Repositioned Animal Fats as a Health Choice

Concerns about ultra-processing, genetic modification, and long-term health have gone mainstream



Social media has amplified skepticism, transforming it into a widely shared, socially validated belief



In response, animal fats are being reframed as traditional, minimally processed, flavor-forward options that tap into sustainability cues and "how our grandparents cooked," offering both emotional reassurance and premium appeal

→ "39% cite health concerns as primary reason for avoiding seed oils"

→ "20% have already stopped using seed oils entirely"

- Coast Packaging Survey

→ "63% of consumer believe seed oils are over-processed"

→ "62% of consumer think seed oils are genetically modified"

- IFIC/Purdue University

## Beef Tallow

### KEY NUTRIENTS

Vitamin A:  
Promotes skin cell regeneration, helps maintain skin elasticity, and supports a healthy skin barrier.

Vitamin E:  
Acts as an antioxidant, protecting the skin from free radicals and preventing premature aging.

Palmitoleic Acid:  
Possesses anti-inflammatory properties, soothes irritated skin, reduces redness.

Vitamin D: Regulates melanin production, essential for skin health and sun protection.

Vitamin K: Supports overall skin health, aids in wound healing, and reduces dark circles and bruising.



Vitamins  
A, E, K, & D + Palmitoleic Acid

# The Return of Animal Fats: **Taste Superiority and Cooking Performance are Driving the Comeback**

A meaningful share of consumers are choosing animal fats simply because they deliver better flavor and more reliable cooking performance. Richness, mouthfeel, and high-heat stability make animal fats feel less like a compromise and more like an upgrade in everyday cooking.

Beef tallow is making a comeback as consumers move away from highly processed oils and return to traditional cooking fats. Once considered outdated, it is now valued for its minimal processing, richer flavor, and strong high-heat performance. What began as a niche preference is expanding into a broader menu and retail opportunity.

“Beef tallow penetration on restaurant menus more than doubled in 2025, rising 113% year over year.”

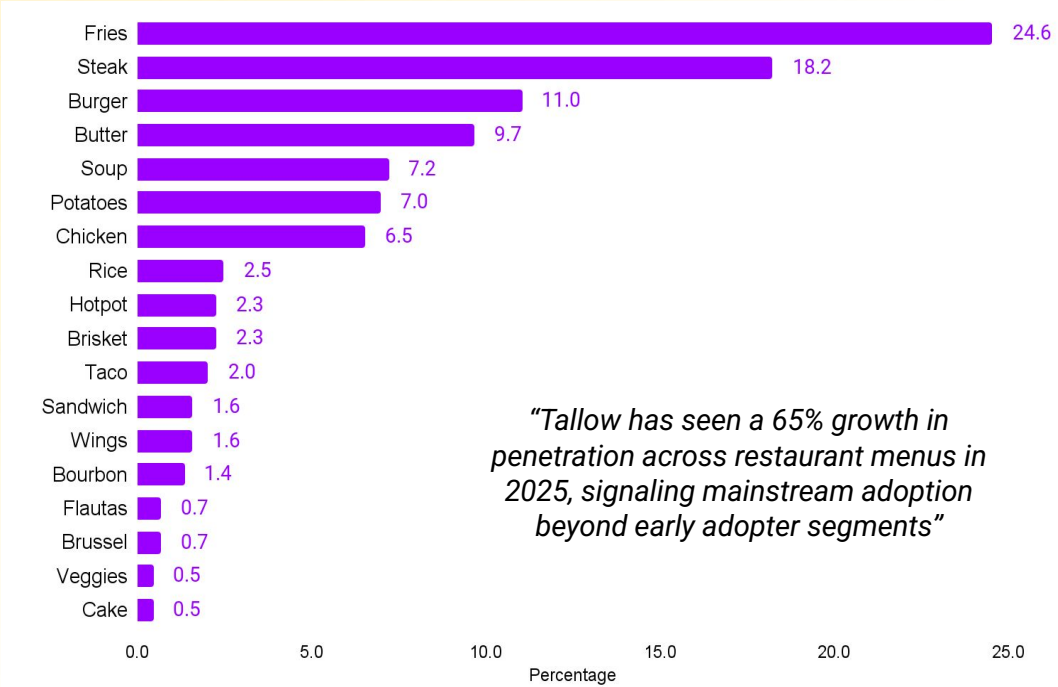
- *MenuData*

Online searches for beef tallow surged 267% year on year (Glimpse Trends Report); while Whole Foods ranked tallow as the #1 food trend for 2026.



# The Return of Animal Fats: Tallow's Expanding Role on Restaurant Menus

Tallow has achieved significant market traction across restaurant menus, with fries, steak, and burgers representing the core applications. However, the most compelling opportunity lies in emerging categories with significantly lower penetration.



*"Tallow has seen a 65% growth in penetration across restaurant menus in 2025, signaling mainstream adoption beyond early adopter segments"*



Chocolate and beef tallow reimaged as an indulgent, chef-driven dessert pairing that turns a "savory fat" into a premium sweet finish

Source: MenuData Insights Platform

# The Return of Animal Fats: **Competitive Advantage Through Taste**



**Popeyes** adopted **beef tallow** for fried chicken to differentiate on taste and texture, publicly positioning it as superior in crunch and flavor compared to seed oil. The chain achieved first-place ranking in fast-food fried chicken for crunch and texture, validating that tallow delivers measurably better sensory outcomes and driving consumer preference through product superiority rather than health claims alone.

**Steak 'n Shake** executed a complete menu conversion across all **fried items**—fries, onion rings, and chicken tenders—moving entirely to **beef tallow** from commodity seed oils. This represents not a test but a full-scale operational shift, signaling confidence in consumer demand and supply chain stability.



# The GLP-1 Lifestyle Shift: Rethinking Portions, Protein & Profitability



# The GLP-1 Lifestyle Shift: Menu Development in the Age of Appetite Suppressants

## Health-Conscious Demand Surge:

GLP-1 users' reduced appetites are driving a fundamental shift toward smaller, premium portions—half plates, shareables and dessert flights priced at ~75% of full-size items. This consumer demand is only beginning to appear in restaurant menus: "metabolism" and "hydrating" keywords show just 0.06% and 0.45% penetration respectively, indicating most QSR players are still undeserving this segment.

## The Scale of the Opportunity:

Roughly 6% of U.S. adults (~20 million people) currently use GLP-1s, with 30% expressing interest. Yet current menu offerings lag demand: wellness-adjacent keywords (gut health, fermented, fiber) remain extremely underpenetrated (0.12%-0.25% of menus), revealing a massive competitive gap.

To capture GLP-1 consumers, restaurants must accelerate adoption of protein-packed, fiber-rich, low-sugar dishes with smaller portion architecture—categories. Success requires offering mocktails, low-ABV drinks, and nutrient-dense snackables that align with functional nutrition trends. The low current penetration of these terms in restaurant menus signals first-mover advantage for brands willing to rebuild their menu architecture around GLP-1 consumer preferences.

Theme	Keyword	Penetration	Growth
glp-1	metabolism	0.06%	60.0%
glp-1	hydrating	0.45%	16.7%
glp-1	gut health	0.12%	13.3%
glp-1	fermented	1.52%	4.9%
glp-1	wellness	0.24%	3.0%
glp-1	fiber	0.25%	2.9%

Source: MenuData; 50K Sample

# Cuba Libre's GLP 1 Menu

**First-of-its-Kind Offering:** Cuba Libre Restaurant & Rum Bar became the **first U.S. restaurant group** to launch a dedicated **GLP-1 support menu**, available at all four locations (Philadelphia, Atlantic City, Washington, D.C., and Orlando).

**Science-Backed Menu Design:** Developed in collaboration with **Dr. Charlie Seltzer**, an obesity medicine specialist, the five-item menu focuses on **high-protein, moderate-fat, and fiber-rich** dishes to support GLP-1 users' nutritional and digestive needs.

**Accessible and Appealing:** Portions are **smaller and priced about 25% lower** than comparable menu items, emphasizing flavor and enjoyment to encourage eating despite reduced appetite among GLP-1 users.

## GLP-WONDERFUL MENU



HOURS | COMING SOON OCT. 27

### GLP-Wonderful Menu

Menu created by Culinary Director Chef Angel Roque, under the guidance of Dr. Charlie Seltzer, board certified internist, obesity expert and Certified Strength and Conditioning Specialist

#### Ropa Vieja

Braised, shredded and stewed beef brisket, tomatoes, bell peppers, onions, rice & beans, asparagus

#### Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving: Calories 460, Fat 9-11g, Fiber 9g, Carbohydrate 55g, Protein 28g

#### Vaca Frita

Braised brisket shredded then seared, roasted onions, citrus-garlic sauce, broccolini, fresh avocado

#### Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving: Calories 420, Fat 28g, Fiber 5g, Carbohydrate 8g, Protein 36g

#### Pollo Asado

Grilled citrus-marinated chicken breast, roasted garlic mashed potatoes, broccolini

#### Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving: Calories 430, Fat 12g, Fiber 4g, Carbohydrate 20g, Protein 56g

#### Camaron Salteado

Sautéed shrimp with grape tomatoes and fresh herbs, rice & beans, avocado

#### Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving: Calories 400, Fat 12g, Fiber 8g, Carbohydrate 38g, Protein 34g

#### Salmon a la Plancha

Pan-seared skin-on salmon fillet, EVOO, sea salt, grilled mushrooms and asparagus

#### Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving: Calories 450, Fat 23g (healthy omega-3s), Fiber 4g, Carbohydrate 7g, Protein 42g



# Smoothie King GLP-1 Support Menu

Five scientifically formulated blends designed by registered dietitian Molly Kimball to meet GLP-1 users' unique nutritional needs:

- ≥20g protein to support satiety and muscle preservation
- Zero added sugar to align with reduced-calorie preferences
- Added fiber to address GI side effects
- Functional blends (Gladiator, Keto Champ, Slim N Trim) targeting specific dietary challenges

Available nationwide across all U.S. locations and digital ordering, positioning Smoothie King as a frontrunner in GLP-1-conscious innovation.

**NEW! NEW! NEW! NEW! NEW!**

# SMOOTHIES FOR GLP-1 SUPPORT

**PROTEIN, FIBER AND 0g ADDED SUGAR**



Gladiator® GLP-1  
Chocolate ›

Power Meal  
Slim™ GLP-1  
Strawberry ›

Slim N Trim™ GLP-1  
Mango Greens ›

# Key Takeaways



## Next-Gen Texture Play

Texture is the hook—layered crunch, chew, and creaminess, delivered with clean labels, is what makes one bite turn into a ritual.



## Hyper-Nostalgia

Nostalgia wins when you take the childhood favorite everyone remembers and rebuild it for adults with better ingredients, better craft, and a story worth paying more for.



## The Return of Animal Fats

Animal fats are a short-lived edge—tell the “how we used to cook” story now, lock in supply, and bank the premium before everyone else catches up.



## GLP-1 Lifestyle Shift

Smaller portions are the new normal, and the brands that right-size first will cut waste, protect check averages, and feel on the side of the guest.