

## 2016 Food Trends

It's a brand new year and with a new year comes "new health food trends". I hate referring to health food as a trend so let me explain what I mean in using that term. Health food trends really aren't introducing new foods per se. The food has always been around and has always been healthy! More often than not, the food is well known and frequently consumed in other cultures. It becomes a "trend" when it gets popularized in the media as they tout the health benefits and recipes begin to crop up using the "new" health food. Slowly, groceries begin to pick up on the "new trend" and start to carry the food enabling consumers to start buying. So although the term "new health food trend" irritates me to some degree, because healthy food isn't a trend and these foods are not new (perhaps just to us), it does introduce many of us to different foods we may not have known about, had access to or would have otherwise tried even if we did.

Here are my top 5 predictions for health food trends for 2016 in North America:

1. **Fermented foods** – With the increasing awareness of the importance of healthy digestion, I believe that the popularity of fermented foods will increase as will the variety of fermented foods available. The more well-known fermented foods include kimchi, tempeh, sauerkraut, and fermented brown rice. Fermentation enables us to absorb more of the nutrients in the food including vitamins, minerals and some amino acids. Additionally fermentation can increase the anti-oxidants in our food. I'm sure you'll be hearing more about fermentation and fermented foods this year.
2. **Sea Vegetables** – Sea vegetables such as wakame, kelp, nori and kombu have been a staple in Japanese cultures for some time. Spirulina, a blue-green algae, dates back to the Aztecs who used to dry it and consume it. I predict that in 2016, sea vegetables will begin to gain more popularity as a healthy food to add to one's diet and will probably take over kale's position in the near future as the new "it" food. Sea vegetables have many benefits. They have a good source of iron and vitamin C, an important combination since vitamin C helps to enhance the absorption of iron. Additionally, sea vegetables are rich in iodine making them a good addition to the diet of someone who is suffering from hypothyroidism due to iodine deficiency. Spirulina has an amazing nutrient profile. It's a great source of anti-oxidants and is also anti-microbial. Some research suggests it can even boost immunity. Spirulina is also a complete protein, meaning it contains all the essential amino acids. In addition, the protein in spirulina is highly bioavailable which essentially means that the protein contained in spirulina is highly digestible and usable by our bodies. Expect to see more sea vegetables in the form of dried snacks, baked into crackers and on more menus in trendy local restaurants over the next few years. I personally add spirulina to my breakfast smoothie every day!
3. **Kaniwa** – move over quinoa, kaniwa is the new kid on the block. Kaniwa, a close relative to quinoa, is a "pseudo-grain", in that it's a seed that we cook and eat like a grain. It is gluten free and is much smaller than quinoa. In terms of its nutrient profile, it is similar to that of quinoa. Where it differs is kaniwa does not have saponins which need to be rinsed from quinoa before it is cooked (unless you purchase pre-rinsed quinoa). Kaniwa can be made into a salad by cooking it up and adding it to mixed greens or shaved Brussels sprouts and cranberries for a nice winter season salad. Kaniwa is still relatively unheard of here in North America. I expect it to start to gain popularity and eventually surpass quinoa (although I don't believe that will happen quite this year). Keep your eyes open for this "new" pseudo-grain.

4. **Kohlrabi** - Kohlrabi is a vegetable and literally stands for “cabbage turnip” in German. But it actually isn’t a root vegetable at all. Like cabbage, kale, Brussels sprouts, and broccoli, it is a cruciferous vegetable and member of the member of the Brassica family. To be honest, I only recently discovered kohlrabi myself and now I have to say I’m hooked. It has a very mild flavour, kind of like a turnip but a little sweeter. If you aren’t familiar with the health benefits of cruciferous vegetables they are numerous. They are rich in sulfur-containing compounds, and have been shown to lower the risk of several types of cancers. Kohlrabi comes in a pale greenish white or purple colour and is a very versatile vegetable. It can be eaten raw or cooked and added to salads or as a side dish. You can even eat the leaves – so zero waste. You can use them as a substitute for kale or Swiss chard. I sautéed them with garlic and a spicy garlic camelina oil and it tasted great! So far kohlrabi isn’t very popular in grocery stores here in Canada, however, I think that as the health benefits, versatility and mild flavour become more widely known, we will begin to see and hear more and more about this wonderful vegetable. Stay tuned in the near future as I share some recipes using kohlrabi.
5. **Sprouted Foods** – Most of us are familiar with sprouts like alfalfa, radish, bean, and pea, however, expect to see a growth in the popularity of other types sprouted foods including chia, almonds, beans and lentils, quinoa and grains such as wheat, rice, millet, barley, and many others. Sprouted foods contain higher amounts of vitamins and minerals than their non-sprouted counter parts and these vitamins and minerals are more readily absorbed and the foods are more easily digested. This is because sprouting grains eliminates the enzyme inhibitors and reduces some of the anti-nutrients such as phytic acid that impact the absorption of some minerals. If you find you feel gassy after eating legumes, sprouting may be your answer. The anti-nutrient raffinose in grains and legumes, which is responsible for causing gas in some individuals, is also degraded during the sprouting process. And the benefits don’t stop there. Sprouted grains have been shown to have a lower glycemic index than non-sprouted equivalents. Sprouted grains have less starch and a higher proportion of protein and fiber which also helps you feel fuller longer. You can typically find sprouted grains and even sprouted flour for baking at an organic grocery store, however, they can be quite pricy.

So be on the lookout for these five foods at your grocer. While not every grocery store in Canada (at least not in Mississauga where I live) carries them at this time, I expect that they will slowly become more available as we start hearing about them in the media. I’m interested to see if my predictions pan out this year. Either way, the items listed have positive health benefits and are worth trying out if you can find them.