

Dr Alex Teo on proactive wellness in APAC: Embracing healthy aging and evolving nutrition trends

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As the Asia Pacific region experiences rising life expectancy and increasing awareness of preventive health, consumers are redefining wellness beyond traditional fitness and nutrition. From personalised supplements to tech-driven health insights, the landscape of proactive healthcare is evolving rapidly. In this exclusive email interview, Dr Alex Teo, Director of Research Development & Scientific Affairs, Asia Pacific, Herbalife, discusses key drivers shaping the region's health-conscious population, the role of lifestyle choices in ageing well, and the future of wellness innovations in APAC.

What key factors are driving the growing interest in healthy living and ageing across the Asia-Pacific region?

How are consumers redefining wellness in today's world? The growing focus on healthy living and ageing in APAC can be traced to several key factors. People are becoming more conscious about ageing healthily and more aware of chronic health conditions, like diabetes, which has also urged more to focus on prevention. Additionally, the younger generation is placing

more value on long-term health, which in turn shapes their lifestyle choices. People living in urban settings are more aware of the unhealthy lifestyle habits they have and of their increased exposure to environmental stresses. A Herbalife survey revealed this growing awareness, people are changing their daily choices, like diet and exercise, to improve their physical wellbeing. But wellness today is about more than just staying fit. It's about approaching healthcare through a holistic lens, which takes into consideration both the mental and emotional aspects. Tech solutions, like wearables and health apps, have been great for helping individuals improve and manage their well-being – providing insights into everything from nutrition to stress levels. This shift has transformed wellness into something more personalised and data-driven.

As life expectancy increases, what proactive measures can individuals take to maintain overall well-being as they age? How do lifestyle choices and nutrition contribute to this process?

With longer life expectancies, staying on top of our health is more important than ever. Regular exercise, especially strength training and aerobic activity can help maintain mobility and keep your heart and muscles in good shape. Nutrition is just as important. A balanced diet full of antioxidants, healthy fats, lean proteins, and fibre can make a huge difference in supporting long-term health. Mental wellness also plays a big role. Incorporating practices like mindfulness or yoga into your routine can reduce stress, which has long-term benefits for the body and mind. Staying socially connected and keeping your brain active with new hobbies or learning is just as essential as physical health. Lifestyle habits such as staying hydrated, getting quality sleep, and eating a balanced, nutritious diet can also improve how we age. A convenient and effective way to fill in the gaps is by taking supplements – whether it is for joint health, cognitive support, or energy levels. Taking care of our bodies, minds, and spirits will help set us up for a healthier, more fulfilling life even well into our silver years.

What are the major supplement trends for 2025, and how are they meeting evolving health needs? How do probiotics and functional supplements support long-term health and wellness?

This year, the supplement game is shifting toward personalisation. More people are seeking supplements tailored to their specific health needs, and technology is playing a big part in this. Wearables and genetic testing enable individuals to better understand their health, so they can appreciate how their bodies are functioning and choose products that support them best. Also dubbed “the second brain”, gut health is huge right now. Probiotics are taking centre stage for their ability to improve digestion, boost immunity, and even support mental clarity. On top of that, functional supplements like adaptogens (which help with stress management) and collagen peptides (great for skin and joints) are becoming more popular. What's exciting is that we now have a deeper understanding of the brain-gut connection. The constant, bidirectional communication between the brain and the gut influences all aspects of our health, including our immunity and mental and emotional health. With the increasing focus on personalised health, we're seeing a rise in supplements that support multiple aspects of wellness at once. As more research comes out, these trends will likely continue to grow, making supplements an even bigger part of everyday life.

Osteoporosis is a rising concern, particularly among women over 40 in APAC. What dietary and lifestyle-based preventive strategies can help maintain bone density and reduce fracture risks?

Osteoporosis is indeed a growing concern among women over 40 in APAC. One of the key factors here is the hormonal changes that occur, which cause a decrease in estrogen levels after menopause. When these levels drop, it accelerates the process of bone breakdown, making postmenopausal women more vulnerable to osteoporosis and fractures. By 2050, postmenopausal women in Asia are projected to account for more than 50 per cent of all osteoporotic fractures globally, which is why preventive measures are crucial now more than ever. One way to mitigate this would be to consume foods high in phytoestrogens such as tofu and miso soup, as well as nuts and seeds such as flaxseeds and almonds, and fruits like berries and apples. These plant-based compounds help balance estrogen levels, which is important for maintaining bone density, especially for women going through or after menopause. When it comes to prevention, the right dietary choices are essential. A diet rich in calcium and vitamin D is crucial for bone health. Calcium helps to maintain bone mass, while vitamin D supports calcium absorption and strengthens bones. For instance, you can get your dose of calcium from foods like leafy greens such as spinach and broccoli, as well as dairy products like milk and yoghurt. Vitamin D, on the other hand, is readily available from fish with high healthy fat content, like salmon, tuna, and sardines. Aside from diet, regular physical activity is one other way to prevent osteoporosis. In general, weight-bearing and resistance exercises such as aerobic or weightlifting are particularly beneficial, as they help strengthen bones and maintain bone density. Additionally, other lifestyle habits are key in protecting bone health. It's important to avoid smoking and limit alcohol consumption. Smoking accelerates bone loss, and excessive alcohol can impair calcium absorption, both of which increase the risk of osteoporosis.

With more people prioritizing an active lifestyle, how does nutrition support energy levels, recovery, and overall physical performance? What key nutrients should individuals focus on for optimal fitness and longevity?

As more people embrace an active lifestyle, we need to understand how nutrition plays a crucial role in fueling our bodies for optimal health outcomes. To start with the basics, a solid diet, whether you're a seasoned runner or just getting into fitness, includes a mix of fruits, vegetables, lean proteins, healthy fats, and good carbohydrates. Each of these components serves a unique purpose in supporting your fitness and health journey. Many of us are aware that protein is a staple in our diets, but did you also know that it's crucial for supporting muscle recovery after engaging in physical activities? For optimal muscle growth and recovery, high-quality proteins are a must. Proteins that are rich in branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs), like leucine, play a significant role in muscle repair after resistance and endurance exercises. These high-quality proteins are commonly found in lean poultry, beef, fish, and dairy. Otherwise, foods like soy and lentils are also excellent choices for those who prefer plant-based diets. Carbohydrates, on the other hand, are the body's primary fuel during exercise. For those who are more active, ensuring that carbohydrate stores in the muscles, liver, and bloodstream are replenished is vital. It's important to remember that carbs aren't the enemy. For those engaging in high-intensity workouts, carbs are essential to maintaining energy levels, and if you ever feel drained during your exercise, it might be a sign that your carbohydrate reserves are low.

It's also worth noting that those who are more active generally require more protein than those who are sedentary. This is because active individuals tend to have more muscle mass, which naturally, demands more protein for muscle repair and growth. Combining protein with sufficient carbohydrates enhances the effectiveness of both nutrients which then allows the body to utilize protein more efficiently and ensures that glycogen stores are replenished.

Looking ahead, how do you see the concept of proactive health and wellness evolving in APAC? What emerging trends or innovations will shape the future of healthy living in the region?

In APAC, we're seeing a notable shift towards proactive healthcare and wellness management. More consumers are taking charge of their well-being, understanding that healthcare is no longer a passive experience. With busy lifestyles and growing concerns over factors like diet and emotional wellness, people are increasingly focused on improving their day-to-day health and well-being. There's also a growing recognition that some aspects of wellness are easier to influence than others, and consumers are seeking tangible results they can measure. Building on the shift towards personalised nutrition, demand has been steadily increasing across the APAC region. South Korea has officially implemented a customised health functional food system, which started in January 2025. This trend is expected to accelerate throughout the region. The personalised nutrition market in APAC is projected to grow from \$2.55 billion to \$8.25 billion by 2032, driven by rising consumer awareness and demand for tailored health solutions. People are increasingly seeking nutrition and wellness plans that suit their unique needs, and we're seeing more advanced solutions emerge to meet this demand.

Another emerging trend is the growing interest in alternative meats, more specifically plant-based proteins. Consumers are placing more focus on protein sources that are natural, easy to digest, and sustainable. In particular, plant-based proteins are gaining popularity, and demand for plant-based meats is expected to surge by 25% across APAC between 2020 and 2025. As the demand for protein continues to grow, consumers are also looking for more flavorful products, meaning that taste remains a top priority for APAC consumers. Lastly, we're also recognising the popularity of supplements in the region. Consumers take supplements to look and feel their best and support their overall physical and mental health. The global vitamins and supplements market is set to hit \$140 billion this year, with APAC leading the charge. Around 34 per cent of consumers in the region take supplements to actively maintain their health, with tablets and capsules being the most popular formats. Other than those formats, liquids, powders, and gummies are increasingly gaining popularity as well. From multivitamins and vitamin C to probiotics and sports nutrition, supplements are becoming a daily staple for consumers focused on gut, immune, and mental health.

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