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By [Ellen Koteff](#), editor-in-chief, FoodChannelPRO

*Healthy beverages on restaurant menus have been gaining momentum and the shift towards drinks with fruit and antioxidants is the natural extension of that trend.*

*“Healthful beverages allow foodservice customers to feel virtuous, pampered and satisfied all at the same time,” says Gail Bellamy, Restaurant Hospitality’s executive food editor.*

*“Whether it’s bottled green tea, fresh-squeezed juice, or a light meal-in-a-glass smoothie, these drinks deliver convenience along with flavor. With today’s nutrition awareness, drinkable snacks offer a quick, healthful pick-me-up. That’s a winning combination.”*

*Several innovative operators are picking up on the “halo of health” beverage trend in a big way. FoodChannelPRO sat down with two of them.*

*Founded in 2004 Manhattan-based [Energy Kitchen](#) is a healthy, fast-casual restaurant that provides nutritious and convenient meal choices by offering low-calorie, low-fat, wraps, salads, burgers and smoothies. Everything on the menu is 500 calories or less and is grilled, baked or steamed, never fried, and cooked to order. Behind the strength of a 2008 investment partnership with Mike Repole, the co-founder of Vitaminwater, which sold to Coca-Cola for \$4.1 billion, Energy Kitchen has already grown the concept to 10 restaurants throughout the greater New York metropolitan area and recently launched a national expansion plan.*



*The concept’s founder, Anthony Leone, is on the front lines of business development and actively involved in menu innovation. Here’s his take on the trend and his bottomline.*

Creamsicle Smoothie from Energy Kitchen



**Has your business in the snack hours from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. improved as a result of the healthy drinks on your menu?**

Yes, people during those hours are looking for a snack to get them through the middle of the day lull that everyone hits, but they do not want to just grab anything. We see a lot of guests coming in for our smoothies, which are a great way to have something healthy on the go. Our smoothies are low calorie and full of energy-boosting protein, and we also do custom blends so that guests can create their ideal pick-me-up by adding things like Echinacea, Vitamin C, Whey Protein, and more.

**Do you see an increasing demand for healthy beverages in foodservice?**

Yes, my partner Mike Repole was co-founder and president of Vitaminwater. He proved that people want to get away from the sodas and do not want to drink their calories. That is why at Energy Kitchen we only have low calorie beverage alternatives.

**What is your most popular healthy drink?**

One of our most popular drinks is our Vaccinator Smoothie. It's made with orange juice, bananas, fresh strawberries and packed with Vitamin C. The Vaccinator is only 183 calories for a 24 ounce serving size.

**How were the healthy beverages created? How long was the process? Where did the ideas come from?**

Each beverage on our menu is created with our guests in mind. Our focus is always on low calorie, high nutrition, and tasty beverages. We look at seasonal and popular ingredients, the nutrition needs of our consumers and we get to work finding a way to create beverages that taste amazing, are packed with protein and vitamins, and remain low in calories; something most concepts aren't doing. Sometimes the process can take months, but we want to make sure that we're doing it right and that these are beverages our guests are going to love.

**Do you think there is room to grow in the healthy drink, snack category? If yes, how much?**

Absolutely, our smoothie category is up 72% from last year. This year we introduced Pirates Booty, which are trans-fat & gluten-free, low calorie baked snacks, to our restaurants and the customer feedback has been great. People are looking to take the thinking out of eating healthy and our restaurants and snacks allow you to do that because we eliminate any temptation from our restaurants. Every Energy Kitchen location is full of nutritious, low calorie, tasty snack and meal options.