

Artifact 1: [Wellness trends worth taking into the new year \(and some that aren't\)](#)

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Source: NPR

Wellness trends worth taking into the new year (and some that aren't)

Trying to keep up with the flood of wellness trends last year was [bewildering](#). Influencers promoted seemingly endless products and experiences under the banner of "wellness." Some trends, like celery juicing, [cold plunges](#) and protein bars have been around for a few years now. But other trends that came across our radar in 2025 had more of an "old is new again" energy, like embracing full-fat dairy and cooking with beef tallow.

At NPR's science desk, we did our best to pick apart what's healthy and what's hype. Here are seven of the trends NPR reported on, and what the data and experts had to say about them.

Trend: A return to full-fat dairy

For decades, public health messaging warned against high-fat dairy. But the argument against it is largely "circumstantial," says Benoit LaMarche, a Canadian food scientist who headed up an [evidence review](#) of the relationship between dairy and heart disease risk, published in May.

The review concluded that generally speaking, fat-free, low-fat and full-fat dairy products had the same effects. Some studies have even shown the benefits of higher-fat over lower-fat dairy. For instance, one study that followed 18 adults for three weeks found drinking whole milk actually outperformed skim milk when it comes to raising HDL, or "good" cholesterol.

Moreover, experts are saying that worrying about the fat content in dairy is essentially a distraction from bigger dietary concerns like eating foods with too much salt, refined carbs and sugar.

The topic's on the radar since Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. [promised](#) to end the "attack on whole milk, cheese and yogurt." It's also increasingly popular online among those participating in the TikTok-driven ["cottage cheese comeback."](#)

Trend: Wearing a weighted vest while taking your daily walk

Is [striding around](#) in an uncomfortably heavy vest a great workout that marries strengthening, weight loss, and cardio with fresh air and sunshine — or are wearers merely projecting a fitness-y image to their neighbors?

Weighted vests are often marketed to [women in their 40s](#), looking to increase muscle and bone growth to mitigate the effects of decreasing estrogen. But the evidence that wearing them works for that is particularly scant.

One small study compared people walking with weighted vests with those who walked without them and found no significant difference in bone health. Another study did find some benefits for people who wore weighted vests while engaging in resistance workouts, but the study doesn't make clear whether the vests or the exercises were the cause of healthy bone growth.

If you want a science-backed way to build muscle or replace bone density lost during perimenopause and menopause, experts like exercise scientist Lauren Colenso-Semple recommend [resistance training](#).

Weighted vests may have some benefits for cardiovascular health, says Roger Fielding, who studies exercise science at Tufts University. Plus walking the same distance with more weight will burn more calories. (Just don't expect us [to do choreo, ok?!](#))

Bottom line: Won't hurt but there are better ways to build muscle. [Read the full story.](#)

Trend: Scientifically tracking your blood sugar, even if you don't have diabetes

Motivation is a tricky business for people looking to get leaner or eat healthier. The reward of fitting into a dress for a wedding that's months away, or logging lower blood sugar at your next physical is uncertain and remote – but that rum cake will provide the jolt of satisfaction you crave right now. So could real-time data shift the calculus?

That's the promise behind wearing a continuous glucose monitor, or CGM, a small device that sticks to the back of the arm. Every few minutes it sends a signal to your phone estimating the concentration of sugar in your blood. The tech has been a game-changer for some people with diabetes, providing a more user-friendly alternative to finger prick tests.

For people *without* diabetes, the theory is, a wearable glucose monitor can show you which snacks or meals make your blood sugar spike too high, and you can modify your diet accordingly.

According to the research, CGMs have helped some people lower their blood sugar or lose weight – others not so much.

There was a lot of personal variation in the results of two recent studies, says Collin Popp, a researcher at NYU Grossman School of Medicine who helped lead one of the studies. "We had individuals coming back and saying, 'You changed my life. I lost 30 pounds and I feel great.' Other people in the study put on weight," he says.

If you try a CGM, you may want to take the data with a grain of salt. One recent study found that the same meal eaten on two different days gave very different readings. Another small study found that the continuous glucose monitor overestimated people's blood sugar levels compared with measuring it in a blood test.

Bottom line: Continuous glucose monitors can be helpful, but take them with a grain of salt. [Read the full story.](#)

Trend: Drinking a bright blue dye

Here's a weird one. Wellness influencers have been singing the praises of a synthetic dye that stains their tongues blue, and they claim it offers a host of benefits. Methylene blue dye is far from new. Formulated as a textile dye in the 19th century, it's since been prescribed as a treatment for malaria, cyanide poisoning, and methemoglobinemia, a rare blood disorder.

Biohackers claim that methylene blue improves the function of the cells' mitochondria, thereby slowing aging, improving mood and cognition, among other benefits.

Studies in rodents have shown methylene blue does improve mitochondrial function and reduce inflammation. But in preliminary human studies, the results haven't shown significant benefit in healthy people, says Lorne Hofseth, a researcher at the University of South Carolina College of Pharmacy.

And there's risks, including serotonin toxicity – a drug reaction that can cause elevated blood pressure, diarrhea, seizures, and even death. And like other supplements, methylene dye isn't tested for safety before it goes to market. It can be hard to know what you're really getting.

Bottom line: You're probably turning your tongue blue for no reason. [Read the full story.](#)

Trend: More protein in everything ... even your Oreos!

If you want protein on the go, you don't have to look far. Grocery and convenience store shelves are lined with bars, cookies, brownies and other snack foods with "high protein" printed on the label.

But how do you suss out marketing from fact? It turns out there's no particular metric manufacturers need to meet in order to advertise a product as "high protein." For instance, a candy with 1 gram of protein may have a high-protein marketing claim on the front of the package, which admittedly is a lot more than most candy, says physiologist Stefan Pasiakos, but clearly doesn't make it healthy.

One quick rule of thumb to assess protein claims is to check the percentage of the daily value of protein on the nutrition facts label on the package. Anything 20% or above can be seen as high protein, according to the FDA.

And even if they are high protein, packaged snacks can also be high in calories, sugar, or processed ingredients. You'll do better to get protein from whole foods like yogurt or during meals, say nutritionists.

That being said, protein snacks can be a convenient way to reduce muscle soreness [after a workout](#).

Bottom line: Junk food is still not a good choice, even with protein added. [Read the full story](#).

Trend: Beef fat is back, baby! For cooking (and skincare?!)

This March, Health Secretary Kennedy [sat down at a fast food burger joint](#) with Fox News host Sean Hannity, to talk about obesity and metabolic disease. The two were at a Steak N' Shake in honor of the chain's switch from vegetable oil to tallow, or rendered beef fat, to cook French fries.

Tallow was phased out of fast food chains decades ago, but Kennedy says it's a healthier alternative to seed oils (aka vegetable oils), which he [claimed in a post on X](#) are "one of the driving forces of the obesity epidemic."

So are fries cooked in beef tallow any healthier?

"People should eat fewer French fries, whatever they're deep fried in," says nutrition scientist Christopher Gardner.

Beef tallow and other saturated fats can lead to clogged arteries and high blood pressure, he notes. And as a threat to health, [seed oils](#) have been unfairly villainized, says cardiologist. Dariush Mozaffarian, at Tufts University.

The real health villains in junk food are excessive amounts of refined grains, starches, and sugars, as well as salt and other preservatives, chemical additives, he says.

Meanwhile [skincare products made from beef tallow](#) are trending this year, too. It's all part of a cultural moment where people are skeptical of synthetic ingredients, says Jennifer Reich, a sociologist at the University of Colorado Denver. As a sort of shortcut to healthier choices, Reich says people opt for things like beef tallow that seem natural because it ostensibly comes from a farm instead of an overseas factory supply chain. Yet for some users, they can make skin problems like acne worse.

Bottom line: Not so fast. [Read the full story on cooking with tallow](#).

Trend: Creatine supplements are everything

Wellness influencer Bobby Parish declared creatine the "supplement of the year" for 2025 in a [promotional TikTok post](#). It's a compound made from three amino acids that your muscles use as a source of energy. Long

a favorite of body-building gym bros, it's another product that enthusiasts now credit with multiple benefits, including brain function and regulating blood sugar.

The evidence still isn't strong for those two claims, but when it comes to adding lean muscle mass, the evidence for creatine supplements is "overwhelming," says Jose Antonio, a professor of exercise and sports science at Nova Southeastern University in Florida. It can also help provide energy to keep at your workout longer.

But one big caveat here: Taking supplements isn't enough to see strength gains – you actually have to get your butt to the gym and work out. A review of 35 studies found that when creatine supplements were combined with resistance training, adult men added around 2 to 3 pounds of lean body mass.

For safety precautions and some basic guidance on how to dose if you'd like to try creatine, [check out the report](#) by NPR's Maria Godoy.

Bottom line: These might actually be pretty helpful, but don't skip the gym. [Read the full story.](#)

Artifact #2: "The Great Divide"

Artist: Noah Kahn

The Great Divide (lyrics)

[Verse 1: Noah Kahan]

I can't recall the last time that we talked
About anything but looking out for cops
We got cigarette burns in the same side of our hands
We ain't friends, we're just morons
Who broke skin in the same spot
But I've never seen you take a turn that wide
And I'm high enough to still care if I die
So I tried to read the thoughts that you'd worked overtime to stop
You said, "back off," and I said nothin' for a while

[Pre-Chorus: Noah Kahan]

You know I think about you all the time
And my deep misunderstanding of your life
And how bad it must have been for you back then
And how hard it was to keep it all inside

[Chorus: Noah Kahan]

I hope you settle down, I hope you marry rich
I hope you're scared of only ordinariness
Like murderers and ghosts and cancer on your skin
And not your soul and what He might do with it

[Verse 2: Noah Kahan]

You inched yourself across the great divide
While we drove aimlessly along the Twin State line
I heard nothing but the bass in every ballad that you'd play
While you swore to God the singer read your mind
But the world is scared of hesitating things
Yeah, they only shoot the birds who cannot sing
And I'm finally aware of how petty and unfair
It was to stare ahead like everything was fine

[Pre-Chorus: Noah Kahan]

You know I think about you all the time
And my deep misunderstanding of your life

And how bad it must have been for you back then

And how hard it was to keep it all inside

[Chorus: Noah Kahan & Dylan Jones]

I hope you settle down, I hope you marry rich (*Oh-oh*)

I hope you're scared of only ordinariness (*Oh-oh*)

Like murderers and ghosts and cancer on your skin (*Oh-oh*)

And not your soul and what He might do with it

[Post-Chorus: Noah Kahan]

Ah-oh

[Bridge: Noah Kahan]

Rage, in small ways

Did you wish that I could know

That you'd fade to some place

I wasn't brave enough to go?

[Chorus: Noah Kahan]

I hope you settle down, I hope you marry rich

I hope you're scared of only ordinariness

Like murderers and ghosts and cancer on your skin

And not your soul and what He might do with it

[Post-Chorus: Noah Kahan & Dylan Jones]

Ah (*Ah*), woah

Ah

Ah, Lord

Ah

[Outro: Noah Kahan]

I hope you threw a brick right into that stained glass

I hope you're with someone who isn't scared to ask

I hope that you're not losing sleep about what's next

Or about your soul and what He might do with it

Artifact 3: [Pollinators, invasive species: their importance at USI](#)

Author: Rose Robinson , Assistant News Editor

Source: The Shield - USI's Student Newspaper

Pollinators, invasive species: their importance at USI

Anyone who enjoys spending time in the outdoors knows what a pain invasive species can be. Whether it be multiflora roses attempting to recreate sleeping beauty's castle, or kudzu carpeting everything in sight, these plants have a tendency to take over ecosystems and stifle native plants and animals. In fact, many invasive species can be found on USI's campus.

Bradford Pears, a species of ornamental tree, has been used on the landscaping in many of USI's gardens. Students may have noticed that the Bradford Pears were removed from the parking lot just outside the Pott College building. Their removal was organized by Joseph Cirrincione, junior chemistry and pre-med major, in conjunction with USI faculty.

"All the animals, the birds, the pollinators, insects, all of them need these trees and bushes and whatnot, so the big reason for the Bradford Pear removal is that they're invasive, and they aren't very helpful to the pollinators that we have around," Cirrincione said.

In America, a species is usually considered invasive if it was brought to America during or after European colonization, and has escaped the binds placed upon it by human cultivation. Tomatoes, though not native to southern Indiana, are not considered invasive because they do not tend to escape from gardens and propagate outside of them. Bradford Pears are considered invasive because their seeds tend to escape from gardens with the help of local wildlife, and they quickly displace local species once they have been introduced to an ecosystem.

"Most things, like your rose bushes and boxwoods, stay where you put them, but the invasive plant species tend to reproduce very quickly, and they tend to spread into our wild areas, and that's really where they start having negative effects," Edith Hardcastle, associate professor of biology, said.

Once invasive species have been introduced to an ecosystem they tend to choke out native plants and develop into a monoculture, a space where only one plant grows. This is a problem because the greater the amount of biodiversity in an ecosystem, the better an ecosystem is able to respond to disturbances. As climate change and pollution continue to affect ecosystems worldwide, invasive species are hindering the ability of many ecosystems to withstand the changes.

In addition to causing a decrease in species diversity, the introduction of invasive species into an environment can rob native wildlife of their food sources. Native animal species have not adapted to eating the fruits of invasive species, and the fruits of many invasive plant species have a lower nutritional content than the fruits of native plant species.

A number of pollinator species have evolved to feed exclusively on the nectar of a certain species of plant, and their populations decline when invasive species outcompete those plants. Additionally, the decrease in the nutritional content of the diet of pollinators who can consume the nectar of invasive species can cause their populations to decline because they are not getting the food that they need. Given that pollinators are a major food source for many animal species, the decline in their populations results in a decline in their predators' populations as food grows scarce.

“[Invasive species] keep spreading and growing and basically taking up more space, but not really providing any benefit or [becoming] part of the food chain,” Hardcastle said.

While removing invasive species from the environment, and rectifying the effects that they have had on local ecosystems may seem daunting, it is doable.

In 2020 the Terrestrial Plant Rule banned the selling of forty-four of the worst invasive species in Indiana, including autumn olive and Japanese honeysuckle. The Vanderburgh County Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) organizes weed wrangles where volunteers remove invasive species throughout Evansville, and they offer training on how to effectively remove invasive species from your own garden or backyard. CISMA can be contacted on Facebook and by email at vanderburgh.cisma@gmail.com.

Local greenhouses, such as Goldfinch Nursery and Colonial Gardens, sell native plants for people to grow in their gardens. One does not need to have a large backyard or enormous garden to make a positive impact on local pollinator populations, just a few potted plants or a window garden can provide native pollinators with the food that invasive species have driven out of local ecosystems.

“If our pollinators all go away we’re going to lose food sources, and all that which we need to survive, so I think it’s just necessary to make sure ... we’re doing our part to ensure they have the best chance of survival.” Cirrincione said.

Artifact 4: [New Yorker Cartoon](#)

Source: The New Yorker

Cartoonist: Matt Reuter

