

# FAST FACTS FROM FONA: TRENDS IN THE PANDEMIC ENVIRONMENT

In a world where everything is changing, we want to keep you informed. In this, our third installment of trends in the unprecedented environment of COVID-19, we're continuing to keep our finger on the pulse of how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting the food and beverage industry.

As we discussed [earlier this month](#), we know that consumers are proactively seeking ways to boost their immunity and learning new skills in the kitchen since cooking has become a greater necessity. This week, we're examining the ways that consumers are in search of comfort foods as well as indulging in virtual happy hours with alcohol sales soaring. Let's take a closer look at the trends we are spotting this week.



## TIME FOR A QUARINTINI

Not only are many consumers stockpiling their pantries, liquor cabinets are overflowing as well. With virtual happy hours on the rise, it's no surprise the sales of alcoholic

beverages grew 55% in the third week of March compared to the same time one year ago, according to Nielsen. Online sales are on the rise with 243% growth, compared to the same time period last year. Consumers are seeking convenience when it comes to alcohol with the sales of canned cocktails up 93% for the same week and canned wines increase by 95%, as reported by Forbes.

A social listening search for "alcohol" is showing a 64% increase in posts from March 8-March 18th, 2020. As the weekend was well underway, we saw a huge spike in "alcohol" related posts and on Saturday, March 28, 2020 there was an increase of 118% with 25 mentions per minute in just one day—showing consumers truly are living by the hashtag "#saturdaysareforsipping." Males between the ages 25-34 years old were the key demographic with 80% of all posts, according to Infegy Atlas.

## Since it truly is 5'clock somewhere, here are some ways consumers are getting in the 'spirit':

- **Alcohol Delivery on the Rise**—Boston-based mobile ordering app **Drizly** has seen a sales increase of 300% to 500% since January in cities such as Boston, Chicago and Seattle, and the average basket spend was about 30% above normal levels as reported by CSP Daily News.
- **Happy Hour from Your Haus**—apertif brand Haus is hosting weekly, virtual happy hours. Co-founders of Haus have taken to Zoom for 'virtual aperitivo hours.' Anyone over the age of 21 is welcome to attend with a drink of choice. Attendees are encouraged to bring questions, but active participation is not required. The final rule stated on the Zoom invite is: "Be nice. Bad vibes will be removed." Source: Mintel
- **Curb-Side Pick-up**—while dine-in restaurants are currently unavailable, many restaurants and bars are offering their signature cocktails in a to-go format. Please Don't Tell (PDT) in New York's East Village became one of the first in the city to start selling pre-batched cocktails to go from a Yeti cooler out front, according to Esquire.
- **Drink Tutorials**—an online drink tutorial series called Tip Your Bartender, hosted by Punch, an online beverage magazine is offering livestream mixology tutorials. Each livestream is hosted by a different mixologist who is sharing cocktail recipes with tips and tricks for consumers. The participants are encouraged to "tip" the bartender to help raise funds for idled workers, according to Fast Company.
- **DIY Cocktail Kits**—restaurants like Chicago's Aviary is selling cocktail kits for \$72, allowing consumers to make 6-8 of their refreshing cocktails at home. The kit is complete with all of the fixings to make the Aviary Cocktail. A take-out order must be ordered from Next, Roister, or Alinea in order to purchase the kit, according to Concierge Preferred.



## SEEKING COMFORT (FOOD)

In uncertain times, we often find ways to enjoy simple pleasures to satisfy our taste buds which in turn we hope will make us feel good at

the same time. Comfort foods are one thing consumers often turn to when they need a pick-me-up. We know that “comfort foods” are a matter of perspective based on overall consumer experiences, but traditional favorites always rise to the top.

A social listening search for “comfort food” is showing a 178% increase in posts from March 15-March 22, 2020. As consumers were possibly making their shopping lists for the weekend, we saw a huge spike in “comfort food” posts and on Friday, March 27, 2020 there was an increase of 364% with 51 mentions per minute in just one day. Females between the ages of 35-44 years old were the key demographic, with 90% of all posts, according to Infegy Atlas.

Top posts included: instant pot, slow cooker, chicken pot pie, ground beef, macaroni & cheese, shepherd’s pie, beef stew and chicken noodle soup.

Products that consumers once shied away from in hopes to eat healthier and slim their waistlines are being re-stocked in their pantries. According to Stackline, e-commerce sales of food categories that often provide consumers comfort are growing significantly in just one year, from March

2019-March 2020. Growing categories include: cereal (+214%), chips & pretzels (+186%), popcorn (179%), cookies (+147%), snack foods (+141%), chocolate (+86%).

## Here are some other comforting things we’ve spotted:



- Disney parks may be closed but they want to ensure their fans are able to experience the magic in their own homes and have shared the recipes for their famous **Pineapple Dole Whip and churro bites**.



- Dairy Queen recently introduced a **chicken and mini biscuit basket** that is available for a limited time.
- Bread and pasta are the ultimate carb loading comfort foods and according to NPD, sales of **bread machines are up 800%** and pasta makers were pacing at 3 times their normal sales when compared to one year ago.
- Bon Appetit recently published, “**86 Comfort Foods for Cold Nights, Broken Hearts, and Wednesdays**” on their website. Some of the recipes included are chicken pot pie, French-ish onion soup and of course macaroni and cheese.
- The Texas-based burger and beer chain **Hopdoddy Burger Bar** launched a “Pay It Forward” campaign, where customers can buy one burger for themselves and donate at no charge a burger for a local healthcare professional that are manning Covid-19 patient care.

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## LET’S TALK

At FONA, we’re here to help you fill your critical role in uncharted territory.

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