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ASIA

Building health and immunity as you age

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The demographic challenge of an aging population in Asia has gained increasing attention for some time. Driven by the combined impact of increasing life expectancy and declining fertility rates, Asia Pacific now has 60% of the global population of seniors. It is also the fastest aging region in the world.

With more people living longer, they are prone to several health issues that tend to occur only later in life. Maintaining functional ability and staying healthy longer, becomes a priority for aging consumers.

The opportunity to take control

With an increased understanding of health and well-being, along with rising standards of living, there is growing awareness that a bright future in old age is possible. Today's seniors are focusing more on their quality of life, striving to remain active as they age, and taking a more proactive approach to managing their health.

They want to continue to pursue their hobbies and interests, and enjoy the things they love; playing with their grandchildren, picking them up from school, walking the dog, gardening, living out their dreams later on in life, and catching up with friends.

In addition, consumers also understand that healthy eating habits and nutrition are key building blocks to aging well. As a result of this growing consumer-led demand, there are significant opportunities for organizations to tap into. The functional food market in Asia Pacific is projected to increase from USD$51 billion in 2019 to USD$71 billion in 2025.

How should industries take advantage of this opportunity?

Immunity boost

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is greater awareness on the importance of immunity among consumers especially the elderly. Consumers in Asia have always had a deep understanding on the relationship between food and immunity – a knowledge that is more relevant than ever now. The food industry is responding to this trend with nutrition and immune solutions featuring key macronutrients and ingredients such as protein, probiotics and dietary fiber.

Even before the pandemic, protein or 'high protein' ingredients in food and drink products were already gaining traction, increasing 156% from 2017 to 2019.[3] Similarly, food and beverage products that promote probiotic ingredients with related health benefits such as enhanced immunity increased from 4% in 2017 to 18% in 2020.

With the increased consumer focus on immunity, we are also seeing a growing trend for more personalized and user-specific products. Multiple ingredients are used in combination to enable manufacturers to reach specific segments of the population, with formulations to meet different gender and age group needs

Holistic approach

It is an established fact that moderate exercise reduces the risk of infections by 40-50%.[4] For seniors to age healthily, a holistic approach that combines physical exercise with nutrition is recommended.

An ongoing challenge is the impact of muscle loss in seniors, limiting their mobility. However, nutrition with the right mix of protein, vitamins, carbohydrates and minerals can provide support by helping to build muscle mass and providing fuel to assist recovery.

Companies are also taking a holistic view on how to value-add and differentiate themselves from competitors. With the growing demand for healthy aging food and beverage solutions targeted at seniors, there is an immediate opportunity to tap on this market that has the potential to reach approximately USD$31 billion by 2026. In our recent study conducted with Ipsos in November 2020, insights showed that only 3.5% of food and beverage solutions introduced to the market were targeted at seniors, indicating a huge untapped market.

The opportunities to build transformational lifestyle changes through developing healthy aging consciousness earlier in life is at the forefront of many consumers' purchasing decisions. Consumers are increasingly becoming more aware of the nutritional and health benefits of high fiber or high protein diet and the impact on their overall immune health. At IFF, innovation has been at the heart of our organization and we have a broad range of innovative portfolio that can better cater to our aging consumers who desire to live healthily.

One example is Litesse® polydextrose which has a low glycemic response and is high in fiber – perfect for optimizing digestive health. Similarly, solutions such as SUPRO® high-quality protein can be incorporated into both food and beverages, providing an easy alternative for meals, non-dairy beverages with no compromise on the taste, texture, and eating experience.

Good health is a habit; one that can start anytime in life. Therefore, it is important to provide solutions that cater to different needs – including those for our seniors to help them lead healthy and fulfilling life.