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Why Asia's Hotter Workdays Demand a New Hydration Brief

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When Bangkok's heat index crossed 52°C in May this year, it was more than a weather headline. It underscored that heat is no longer a seasonal discomfort. It is becoming a daily stress test for how people work, commute, exercise and function in their daily lives.

As these conditions become more commonplace, they are also changing what consumers need from the beverages they reach for throughout the day. For years, functional beverages have been built around short bursts of exertion: the gym session, the sprint, the immediate recovery window. But hydration is no longer just about replacing what is lost during those moments. As temperatures climb, hydration must extend beyond these occasions to sustain people through long, sweltering days.

That changes the hydration brief. Beverages can no longer be designed around the workout alone. They must serve the workday. Rather than adding more benefits to the same drink, the industry needs to rethink what that hydration *is for*.

Designing for the Workday

In Southeast Asia, heat rarely arrives alone. Humidity makes it harder for the body to cool down, while crowded commutes and long work hours extend the strain. A drink still has to hydrate. But extreme heat also drains energy and makes concentration harder to sustain through the day.

The workday makes this clear. Across the region, this can mean outdoor workers onsite under the sun, delivery riders in peak traffic, factory teams working long shifts, or office staff arriving at their desks already drained after a humid commute.

These are not short, controlled moments of exertion. They are part of a daily reality where heat exposure is becoming harder to avoid. Yet much of the category's traditional logic still comes from exercise occasions, where the focus is on quick hydration, refuelling and recovery.[1]

The market signals the opportunity. The global functional drinks market is projected to reach US$248 billion by 2030[2]. As temperatures rise across Asia, I believe manufacturers have an opportunity to think differently about hydration. The future of hydration products lies in delivering steadier energy for physical stamina and mental focus, without compromising taste, comfort or everyday enjoyment.

Why the Energy Curve Matters

That starts with carbohydrate choice. Fast-acting, high-glycaemic carbohydrates still have a role in high-intensity sport or immediate replenishment. But for a drink consumed across a shift, commute or long afternoon, the priority is steady, sustained energy, not the fastest lift.

That is where low-glycaemic carbohydrates become crucial. Palatinose™ (which is also known as isomaltulose), a naturally sourced carbohydrate with a low glycaemic profile, is one example. Like sucrose, isomaltulose provides the same amount of glucose when digested, but is absorbed more slowly, releasing that glucose into the bloodstream over a longer period.[3] For beverage manufacturers, this changes the energy proposition from a quick burst to more sustained support.

The brain depends on glucose as its primary source of energy, which means fluctuations in blood glucose can affect concentration and mental clarity. Low-glycaemic carbohydrates may therefore support cognitive performance by promoting a more stable glucose response.[4]

Sustained Performance, Not Just a Single Boost

What changes in the workday context is not the ingredient, but the demand placed on it. A gym session has a start and end. A workday isn’t always so clearly defined. Hours of accumulated heat, physical strain and cognitive load make for a meaningfully different challenge. It is one that calls for steady, sustained energy delivery rather than a fast spike.

A drink consumed once at the gym is a different proposition from one that has to work across an entire day. For repeated consumption to happen, the experience has to earn it.

Palatinose™ is suited to this demand. Its mild sweetness and high solubility keep the drinking experience refreshing enough to return to[5]. And because Palatinose™ remains stable in low pH environments typical of many sports and energy beverages, it performs consistently whether the format is isotonic, hypotonic or hypertonic formulations. Manufacturers have more flexibility in how they formulate.

Research has also begun examining the role of isomaltulose beyond energy delivery. Studies suggest that isomaltulose induces a lower glycaemic and insulinaemic response than sucrose[6], with potential implications for supporting fluid balance during exercise in hot conditions.

Where the Formulation Gets Difficult

Delivering sustained energy and a lower glycaemic profile in one drink is one thing. Keeping that drink refreshing enough that consumers actually want to finish it — in heat and humidity — is where the challenge gets real.

Fast-acting, high-glycaemic carbohydrates can push a drink towards a heavier or sweeter profile. In heat and humidity, that can quickly become a barrier to repeat consumption. A drink that feels cloying, sits heavily in the stomach or tastes too

sweet will not be bought again, however functional it may be.

The answer lies in ingredient choices that serve both goals at once. Low-glycaemic carbohydrates such as Palatinose™ deliver sustained carbohydrate energy while its mild sweetness helps the drink feel lighter on the palate.

The task is not simply to add more function. It is to make the function feel almost invisible. That means steady energy without the spike-and-crash experience, refreshment that holds up through a humid afternoon, and a drinking experience worth returning to.

Ultimately, the most successful products may be those whose functionality consumers barely notice, because the experience itself feels effortless.

The New Hydration Brief

For manufacturers, the larger point is clear. The next hydration brief has to work harder without becoming harder to consume.

Today's consumers expect beverages to be easy to finish and gentle enough for regular use. Ingredients such as Palatinose™ can help turn that expectation into a credible functional benefit. The result is steady energy, a lighter sensory experience and consistent performance through the heat of the day.

The immediate task is to move beyond basic hydration and design beverages that can support Asian consumers through the hotter workdays they are already living through.

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