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Energy Boosters: The Craze Continues

Consumers are looking for energy in all sorts of places these days, from 'high-octane' beverages and foods, to supplements that promote enhanced performance and overall well-being.

By
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Everyone experiences instances where they feel they could benefit from an added boost of energy—whether it be at work, home, school, sporting competitions or weekend outings. In fact, according to the Natural Marketing Institute (NMI), Harleysville, PA, and its Health & Wellness Trends Database, issues related to energy and vitality are of concern to 75% of consumers. Concerns are centered on specific fatigue issues for some individuals, while others are simply seeking products that will give them the stamina to fulfill their daily responsibilities. This is consistent across all age groups from “Gen Y” to “Baby Boomers.” NMI claims consumers are using a variety of sources to help prevent lack of energy, including supplements (59%), food (51%) and beverages (30%).

No matter what form energy boosters are supplied in, it's important to understand that the only way to obtain “true” energy is through the mitochondria of cells in the body. Ron Udell, president, Soft Gel Technologies, Inc., Los Angeles, CA, explained. “Every cell in the body needs oxygen,” he said. “It enables the mitochondria within the cells to manufacture energy by serving as a catalyst for the chemical reaction that turns food into energy. Mitochondria are central to energy production and, therefore, fully integrated into the rest of the cell's physiological responses to aging. The age-related decline of capacity of each cell to manufacture energy (as adenosine triphosphate or ATP) is due to the progressive loss of structural integrity of mitochondria. As the body ages, the cells become less able to maintain adequate levels of cellular energy production.”

Of course Baby Boomers are not the only ones looking for energy boosters to stay active; maintaining and/or increasing energy is something that appeals to many potential target groups, including young professionals, athletes and weekend warriors.

Market Buzz

A vehicle quickly growing in popularity is energy drinks. “Based on the number of new energy beverages that have launched or are in the process of launching, it is clear that consumers prefer to boost their energy with beverages,” said Matt Phillips, vice president of marketing and sales, BI Nutraceuticals, Long Beach, CA. “They are convenient, easy to purchase and typically well known because beverage companies are putting significant marketing dollars behind these products.”

Also making energy drinks trendy is the level of “cool” frequently associated with them, especially in the case of top sellers like Rockstar and Monster. To strengthen the relationships they have with their core consumers, some of these beverages even have their own “MySpace” pages online.

One particular energy drink generating a lot of noise is Cocaine, produced by Redux Beverages, Las Vegas, NV. Cocaine contains more caffeine than a cup of coffee and is billed as “the legal alternative.” The name is part of the company's plan to stand out in the fast-growing energy drinks segment, but some retailers believe the product's name also promotes an image with which they don't want to be associated. Most recently, convenience stores like 7-Eleven refused to sell the beverage after getting complaints from parents of teens, who are a big part of the drink's target audience.

Speaking of teens, Simmons Research reports that more than one-third of U.S. teenagers say they drink energy drinks, representing over 7 million teens—a jump of almost 3 million in three years. The problem with teens searching for an energy boost is that some may consume several cans in a row to get a buzz. According to a new study, poison centers have received an increasing number of calls from young people getting sick from consuming too much caffeine.

This is why Judi Quilici Timmcke, MS, senior technical advisor, TSI Health Sciences, Missoula, MT, believes consumers must approach their energy needs with caution. “People that run on adrenaline usually pay the price when they try to increase their energy levels with sugar and caffeine because they eventually burn out their adrenal glands and pose other types of problems to the body,” she said.

Ken Hassen, PhD, COO, Sigma Tau HealthScience, Inc., New York, NY, said consumers should be aware that there are two distinct types of energy boosters available. “There are products that provide a quick short-term energy boost, but these don't truly provide the type of energy that is consistent with good health, especially metabolic health,” he said. “There are also supplements that provide a more natural type of energy with no sugar spikes or calories involved. This form provides consistent pure energy through ATP, increasing energy throughout the day. From a metabolic standpoint, that's more desirable.

“So even though there is an increasing trend in people seeking energy supplements in the form of liquids, unfortunately these products are the type that provide short-term energy spikes that boost your blood sugar for about an hour or so through large amounts of sugar and caffeine,” continued Dr. Hassen. “They throw in a little bit of taurine and a little bit of carnitine just for label claim.”

But Steve O'Reilly, sales manager, Century Foods International, Sparta, WI, notices that more marketers are starting to change their approach to consumers. “Recently there seems to be a shift toward the ‘sustained energy’ and ‘energy without the crash.’ Americans want to take one pill that lasts all day long or consume one energy drink that lasts all night long,” he said. “Convenience reigns king when it comes to preferred delivery methods.”

Despite the high sugar craze among teens, NMI's Health & Wellness Trends Database reports that usage of low-sugar foods/beverages was favored by 69% of consumers in 2005, with sugar-free foods/beverages following close behind (66% usage).

Low glycemic foods are also gaining ground in the energy market as they have been shown to stabilize blood-sugar levels and provide sustained energy. NMI's database indicates that usage of low-glycemic foods/beverages showed growth in 2005 with 42% of consumers indicating usage, versus 22% in 2004. One-third of consumers also said it's important for their store to have packaged foods that provide a low glycemic index. According to NMI, as just one manifestation of this energy trend, opportunity exists for manufacturers that can deliver effective products and messages on the stable energy benefits of low-glycemic foods and beverages.

“Another trend to look out for are effervescent drink tablets such as Herbalife's LiftOff (for physical and mental fatigue). There also are some interesting new delivery systems like energy gum, mints and strips,” said Danielle



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Thomas, director of marketing and sales, Nutratech Inc., West Caldwell, NJ.

Ingredients with 'Oomph'

TSI's Ms. Quilici Timmcke recommends energy-enhancing ingredients such as ATP, CoQ10 and nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NADH) because they work at the cellular level to help increase energy. "ATP is the major source of the body's energy," she said. "It is necessary for all body functions. The body depletes ATP after exercise and it declines with age. Taking ATP orally can help to stimulate circulation to promote the increase in the body's natural ATP level. This requires only micromolar amounts of ATP. Although people have reported that they feel better with ATP, it works more at the cell level."

According to Soft Gel's Mr. Udell, CoQ10 functions as a carrier to transfer electrons across the membrane of mitochondria to also drive the production of ATP.

Another ingredient that helps aid in increased cellular energy production is L-carnitine. "Research suggests that L-carnitine raises the mitochondrial energy-producing capabilities by reversing the age-associated decline in mitochondrial enzyme activities and thereby protecting mitochondria from aging. L-carnitine also plays a vital role in fat metabolism and energy production," explained Mr. Udell.

Several botanicals are also gaining ground in the energy category. One of the newest products on the energy market is Stella Labs' (Paramus, NJ) Cha' de bugre 10:1 extract. Cha' de bugre is a popular plant in Brazil. Upon chemical analysis, the plant was found to contain bitter caffeine and various other plant sterols. "Stella actually went to Brazil and asked a pharmaceutical manufacturer to create this extract for manufacturers to use as a replacement for ephedra in energy supplement brands," said Deborah Vickery, MBA, marketing and new product development, Stella Labs. "Although it has surprisingly low levels of caffeine, it offers a very powerful, clean, natural energy boost without the nervous jitters or stomach upset commonly associated with stimulants. We have seen a tremendous response to this product, and everyone who is trying it is reporting fantastic results."

Antoine Dauby, marketing manager, Naturex Inc., South Hackensack, NJ, pointed out other botanical ingredients that increase energy like maca and yerba maté. "For centuries yerba maté has been consumed as a traditional tonic and natural stimulant beverage," he said.

Mr. Dauby also highlighted ginseng, which has been used in Chinese medicine for its energy enhancing benefits for the last 2000 years. But, he warns, customers should be aware of some of the current issues associated with ginseng. "Currently, some ginseng root extracts sold on the market today may contain the chemical residues of certain pesticides such as procymidone and quitozene," he said. "Procymidone (commercial name Sumilex) and quitozene (also referred to as PCNB for pentachloronitrobenzene) are both systemic fungicides used widely in horticulture on some fruits, vegetables and non-edible plants. Even if these fungicides are not permitted for use in ginseng cultivation in the U.S. or in Europe, they are widely used in other countries," he explained. "This raises many questions about the purity of ginseng root products and how to ensure that ginseng extracts meet safety standards." Using a proprietary process, Naturex tests to make sure that its ginseng root products are not contaminated with procymidone and quitozene or their metabolites and related impurities, including HCB (hexachlorobenzene), PCB (pentachlorobenzene), TCA (tetrachloroaniline), PCA (pentachloroaniline), a-BHC (benzene hexachloride), R-BHC, y-BHC (lindane) and b-BHC residues.

Also popular on the energy front, according to Rodger Jonas, national business development manager, PL Thomas, Morristown, NJ, are rhodiola rosea and antioxidants. "Rhodiola rosea has been shown to increase brain energy and accelerate the recovery processes after workouts. It also stimulates muscle energy status, glycogen synthesis in muscles and liver and anabolic activity," he said. "And antioxidants, like green tea extract, grape seed extract and lycopene, provide a scientifically applied way of obtaining energy by helping to prevent damage of free radicals in the body."

Stricter Standards?

A relatively unenforced regulatory environment has finally caught up with the energy market. Recently, certain groups have asked for a crackdown on claims made by energy product manufacturers.

"There is a non-profit consumer group called Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) (Washington, D.C.) that has been aggressively lobbying the FDA to enforce stricter standards for functional foods," said Nutratech's Ms. Thomas. "Much of its focus seems to be on energy drinks. CSPI states that some alcohol drinkers rely on energy drinks to 'sober them up' after imbibing and thus may falsely assume they are not too impaired to drive. Other young drinkers are mixing the drinks with alcohol for a 'better buzz.' The FDA doesn't seem to be listening to CSPI at present, but if adverse event reports start filtering in, some of these drinks may come under greater scrutiny."

Sigma Tau's Dr. Hassen believes it only takes one irresponsible member to make things difficult for everybody else. He said while DSHEA (the Dietary Supplement Health & Education Act) was a very good attempt to fulfill a need in the industry, there is too much uncertainty of what is allowed and what isn't. "And too much leeway allows for certain people to make a quick dollar and escape," he said. "This kind of activity injures us all."

Mr. Phillips from BI Nutraceuticals agreed. "At the moment the regulations are not that great. Beverage manufacturers are releasing most of these products, and they generally develop a formula, market it and sell it," he said. "There has been some talk that the regulatory agencies may put certain restrictions on caffeine intake, however, nothing has been passed to date."

A Stimulating Outlook

Despite recent controversy, the desire for energy-enhancing products will remain strong in the future. As quick fix products lessen in demand, sustainable energy products will rise to the top. "The major trend will be to move from caffeine-laden energy products to more natural products," said Mr. Jonas of PL Thomas.

Ms. Vickery also feels consumers will start demanding healthier energy options. "Energy beverages will continue to be hot and very popular," she said. "But you are going to start seeing more healthy functional food applications for energy products that are low in caffeine and calories."

An educated population will increase the interest in botanicals, according to Naturex's Mr. Dauby. "The distributors will have to communicate more about the targeted benefits, the active compounds content and the proven efficacy," he said. "This will be accompanied by an increase in the level of active compounds and the development of blends of several botanicals in order to satisfy customer expectations."

BI Nutraceuticals' Mr. Phillips claims energy will be a dominant category as long as consumers continue to eat poorly, don't get enough sleep or exercise regularly. "I anticipate the category to grow at double-digit rates over the next couple of years," he said. "Consumers continue to demand more products."