VIEWS | OPINION

Nutraceuticals find increasing acceptance in preventing chronic diseases

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By **Manbeena Chawla** | September 29, 2020



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Our lifestyle and day to day routines, work culture and physical activities have significantly changed in the post liberalization of the 1990s in India. A maddening pace of work, coupled with the stress of maintaining an ideal work-life balance, has taken its toll on the health and wellness of individuals. One can feel the heat more so in growing urban centres. At the same time, access to media and information has allowed consumers a better understanding of the latest developments in nutraceuticals.

There has been a growing interest in the Nutraceutical industry by millennials. While they do consume natural food and beverages which enhance energy in a holistic way, routine-like rituals such as high intensity training, muscle building and extreme sports, create a deficit of vitamins and minerals within the body. They need a supplement that caters to the nutritional deficit.

Nutraceuticals is also popularly used for lifestyle improvement such as the quality of skin (colour, tone texture), weight management, sports nutrition and bodybuilding. There has been a steady increase in consumption of natural health supplements and Nutraceutical concoctions by a younger demographic.

Another trend being observed is the growing role of nutraceuticals in preventive nutrition and disease management. There has been a steep rise of chronic and degenerative diseases including diabetes, coronary heart disease, arthritis and obesity in the ageing population.

Nutraceutical solutions are still finding their place in the control and prevention of these diseases. Several studies have demonstrated the usefulness of nutraceuticals as supplementary to routine medications for synergistic management of chronic conditions.

The current pandemic has turned everyone’s attention towards the role of nutraceuticals in building immunity. In a situation of global pandemic, and with few vaccines, either developing or still under clinical trials, the only way to prevent an infection is by strengthening the immune system. In today’s time, every person needs to take care of their immunity. This is especially

true in the case of senior citizens and pregnant women, who are at a higher risk.

A strong immune system maintains good health and can also prevent severe infections. The recent mantra to build immunity is a relatively new trend and has surged quite dramatically since the Covid-19 situation.

Large sub-groups of people in India have diverse needs for nutraceuticals and food supplements, enlisted are the same:

1. Children and teenagers have daily requirements of vitamins and minerals for a healthy development. Functional food and beverage supplements have an important role in this group.
2. Young adults have specific needs as per their changing lifestyle. Stress, anxiety, insomnia, poor eating habits, lack of physical activity, hectic lifestyle, exposure to laptops, TVs and smartphones has created newer challenges.
3. Pregnant and lactating women require different food supplements during different stages of pregnancy. Iron, vitamin B 12 and folic acid are most important among others.
4. Senior citizens (above the age of 60 years) usually suffer from co-morbid diseases including chronic or degenerative disease. Nutraceuticals play a vital role in these patients to replenish the body`s vitamins and minerals.

Future direction

In 2017, the Indian market held only 2% market share of the global nutraceutical market and its estimated valuation stands at around $5 billion as of 2019. It is expected to reach $11 billion by 2023, increasing at a CAGR of 21%. By 2023, India is also expected to hold at least 3.5% market share of the global market.

Innovation and new product ideas are the cornerstone of this industry. Newer innovative formulations like gummies, shots, biscuits, dispersible tablets, beverages are being liked and gaining popularity. Nutritional genomics, nutrigenetics, molecular nutrition, clinical efficacy and

safety of nutraceuticals are being extensively discussed. With rising awareness, physicians, patients and consumers are keen on the effectiveness and safety of these products. Hence, real world evidence and clinical data generation studies demonstrating efficacy are being widely conducted. Clinical studies will be critical in the future for product differentiation and evaluation. Innovation in packaging will also be an important component in the future to suit the changing demographics and appeal to younger demographics.

The nutraceutical industry is going to see a surge in demand when it comes to India. New products and combinations in the pipeline are being launched everyday in the face of the pandemic. A growing focus on immunity has generated a need for immune boosters. Nutraceuticals are finding an increasing acceptance in the treatment and prevention of chronic disease, degenerative disease, lifestyle management and wellness due to a new awakening and awareness amongst people.

To summarize, changes in the Indian healthcare and wellness ecosystem is driving the growth of the nutraceutical industry. Innovation and clinical evidence along with quality will remain the key drivers in a field that is poised to only grow exponentially.

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