



Bulletin Board

News, information and comment

The voice of
the natural health
industry



Protein spiking is a risk for the whole industry

High protein products are long gone as 'exclusives' of the sports nutrition industry and have strategically manoeuvred themselves into mainstream positions over recent years. The growth has seen both mainstream sports brands expanding their product ranges to cater for general health and wellbeing, and non-sports-specific brands and retailers delving into the protein category in search of market share.

While these products were once only seen as helpful for serious athletes and body builders, the general health benefits of protein are now widely accepted. Sports protein accounted for 71% of overall value sales in sports nutrition, reaching £413 million in 2016, with the overall value growth of sports protein products standing at 25%.

Though whey protein is still seen as the 'gold standard', over the last few years we have seen a growth in innovation using other protein sources including beef, brown rice, pea, hemp, cranberry, algae and even insects. But amidst this category growth lies an unfair, yet legal, competitive edge – protein spiking.

Protein is defined in the Food Information Regulation as the protein content calculated using



Katherine Andreassen
is innovation director
at the Nutrition
Group and an HFMA
council member

“Sports protein accounted for 71% of overall value sales in sports nutrition”

the formula: protein = total Kjeldahl nitrogen x 6.25. Legally this calculation can be used.

The problem with this definition is that it allows for protein to be calculated from the nitrogen content of ingredients containing non-protein nitrogen, such as creatine, glycine, taurine and free amino acids. This results in protein claims in the nutritional table, which are higher than those actually in the product.

This can allow for misuse of the health and nutrition claims for protein products, in particular as health claims for branch chain amino acids (BCAAs) have been rejected.

The practice of protein spiking not only misleads consumers,

but distorts the market for food business operators. As protein continues its assault into the market (in drinks, snack bars, cereals, etc), and consumers become more aware of the benefits of protein and start looking for it on labels, this becomes an ever-growing mainstream problem for the health food industry.

In an industry with ever tightening legislation, how can this be allowed to happen? The practice of protein spiking may go against some of the General Food Law principles, but there is currently no legal requirement to list the source of protein (which would separate out the amino acids and other nitrogen sources) as part of the mandatory nutrition declaration.

Will this category continue to enjoy growth in 2017? Without doubt, although I sense a shift into more tailored personalized new product development in this area, but unless legislation catches up, the category risks casting doubts on the ethics of the entire health food industry as it muscles into mainstream!

If in doubt, please contact the HFMA Clear Check team who will be happy to help with advice in this area.

Getting the best from the HFMA

Good manufacturing practice

The safety and quality standards in nutritional products regularly come to the attention of the national media, so it is important for our industry to conduct exemplary practice in accordance with Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP). HFMA policy requires all members to ensure that their products are manufactured in accordance with GMP to protect both their reputation and the industry's.

For more information, HFMA members can access the *Quality Guide for Food Supplements* published by the European Federation of Health Product Manufacturers (EHPM). In addition, all companies applying for HFMA membership are required to sign a declaration of adherence to the principles of the GMP during their manufacturing and distribution process.

News...

Dietary test innovation

Scientists at University College London have now developed a way of testing urine to tell exactly how healthy someone's diet is. The five-minute test can analyze biological markers created by the breakdown of foods such as red meat, chicken, fish, fruit and vegetables. It can also give an indication of the amount of fat, protein, sugar and fibre the person has eaten over the last 24 hours.

It is hoped that the test, which should be available in two years, will be used to help doctors track what their patients have eaten. It has been reported that 60% of people do not accurately state what they have eaten, which is believed to be a contributing factor to Britain's obesity crisis.

NEWS ... NUTRITION FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE

For any national consumer journalists still questioning the value of pre-pregnancy nutrition, a new study from the University of British Columbia may be one of the first to outline the far-reaching implications of skipping supplementation during pregnancy.

The study monitored over 300 elderly people in China, and discovered that those with higher levels of vitamin A were 60% less likely to develop dementia. The study also showed that those

with low levels of vitamin A from birth developed more amyloid, the sticky substance which builds up in the brains of Alzheimer's patients and prevents brain cells from communicating.

Commenting on the study, Dr Weihong Song, a professor of psychiatry and Canada Research Chair in Alzheimer's Disease at the university, said: "Even a marginal deficiency of vitamin A, even as early as in pregnancy, has a detrimental effect on brain

development and has a long-lasting effect that may facilitate Alzheimer's disease in later life."

It's a view that the HFMA has been exploring in a recent Micronutrients and Health APPG, through which it has been educating MPs on the importance of nutritional sufficiency from pre-pregnancy throughout the key life stages. Research such as this is key in educating consumers around good nutrition as a preventative lifestyle measure.