

Big Heart Market

October 28, 2010 by Alissa Marrapodi, Production Editor

Heavy hearts are walking all over the country, and many consumers are looking for ways to heal their “broken” hearts that have nothing to do with options prescribed by their doctors. This market is not only booming, but is in continuous need of attention. The Natural Marketing Institute (NMI) surveyed consumers regarding their buying habits in the heart-health sector. Seventy-five percent of consumers—general population/primary grocery shoppers—indicated they used heart healthy foods/beverages in the past year, and 54 percent are looking to consume more heart-healthy ingredients in their foods/beverages, according to NMI’s Health & Wellness Trends Database®. A total of 54 percent of consumers indicated providing heart-healthy benefits make them more likely to purchase foods/beverages; however, only 19 percent of consumers use supplements for heart health. These data indicate consumers are on the lookout for products that can boost their heart’s “desires” and offer a little protection along the way.

The thing about the heart is it never gets a break. Whether sleeping, eating, running or playing, the heart is always hard at work. “The heart is the hardest working muscle in your body,” said Chris D. Meletis, N.D., director of science and research at Trace Minerals Research. “With an average heart rate of 72 beats per minute, this equates to 103,680 contractions per day. If one was to reflex their index finger 100,000+ times per day, it could not readily perform the same task the next day. Yet, day in and day out, your 10-oz. heart shows up ready to sustain your life. In order for your heart to achieve this amazing feat, it must have adequate coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10) and minerals, including calcium, magnesium, potassium and sodium.”

The heart is the organ that just keeps on giving, and consumers often overlook it until something is wrong. But the heart doesn’t work alone. Many of the body’s daily functions are connected

and help keep the heart strong. “It has long been said and believed that excellent health does begin in the gut,” said Sunil Kohli, COO, Health Plus Inc. “When we eat and digest a meal, the heart is working a bit harder. Conversely, a healthy cardiovascular system supports the digestive and elimination process.”

Eileen Sheets, managing director, Bioforce USA, agreed, stating: “Good heart health is critical to overall good health. Heart health is very lifestyle driven and therefore, is something we can have a lot of control over. According to Nieca Goldberg, M.D., medical director of New York University’s Women’s Heart Program ‘More than half of heart disease is preventable, and studies have shown that 90 percent of heart attacks in women can be prevented.’ That makes you stop and think, doesn’t it?”

Yes, it does. And consumers are stopping in the heart-health aisle trying to figure out ways to boost their beating heart, oftentimes as a result of a recent diagnosis or as a precautionary measure. “Most of our consumers looking to bolster their heart health have been diagnosed with one or more risk factors (high cholesterol, hypertension, etc.) for cardiovascular disease (CVD) or a specific condition (atherosclerosis, etc.),” said Jay Levy, director of sales, Wakunaga. “While the media’s focus is on certain ingredients, most consumers are looking to improve their specific condition. Others see heart-healthy supplements as a kind of natural insurance that can help prevent future heart problems.”

Ken Whitman, president, Peter Gillham, added: “I believe that many people aren’t concerned about blood pressure and cholesterol until they become an issue for them personally. At that point many of them are seeing doctors and being put onto medication. Most doctors aren’t trained in nutrition. So there’s a conflict between the wellness model (body being able to heal itself given the proper nutrients)

and the disease-medication model. I think that makes it very confusing for consumers.”

Heart-health shopping is often symptomatic. “We find that most people do not investigate heart healthy ingredients until they have their first symptom,” said **Dave Leong, manager, Get Well Natural LLC.** “Unfortunately, if a person waits to begin heart-supportive supplements until after their first symptom, then it could be too late if a life-ending heart attack occurs. Most consumers demand instant gratification without understanding the importance of taking supplements for the heart throughout their lives.”

Problem is, there are often no symptoms of heart health conditions. “You have to remember there’s no such ‘condition’ or ‘illness’ as cholesterol; and high blood pressure has no symptoms, it’s only a very strong marker for danger,” said Jonny Bowden, Ph.D., CNS, Barlean’s scientific advisory board member. “So anytime you try to address one of these markers (e.g., triglycerides, blood pressure) you’re really talking about reducing the risk of dying from the condition, not the symptom. That’s why a broad-based supplement program that targets the heart for example is more important than one that targets a specific marker.”

Stuart Tomc, CNHP, Nordic Naturals’ national educator, noted many consumers are simply seeking for an alternative to their current heart medications, as the side effects sometimes outweigh their benefits, and supplements, such as omega-3s, are often a popular alternative to pharmaceuticals. “The omega-3 fatty acids docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) have numerous clinical studies showing they reduce the incidence of cardiovascular events, including heart disease, heart attacks and strokes,” Tomc said.

No matter how or why consumers shop for heart-health supplements and remedies, they are on the lookout for healthy alternatives.

Bigger Heart

This market is huge. It encompasses several aspects of health, from blood pressure and cholesterol to stroke and CVD. This is both good and bad, and at times, can be overwhelming for the consumer, as there are many ingredients and products marketed as "heart healthy"—Think Cheerios and Quaker Oats. These products are hugely known for claims on heart health—and many are confused or unclear as to which ingredients are good for which part of the heart.

"The heart is more than just a muscle mass; it is a rather complex organ, with each part such as ventricles, performing a specific task, like an automobile," Kohli said. "Therefore, it stands to reason that different supplements provide support for different targets and actions. This is why it is such a vast category for retailers."

Sheets added: "It makes it difficult because consumers see the wide

array of products and can be unsure as to which products they really should be taking. Plus, new ingredients become the buzz regularly, giving the impression that the older ingredients are not so effective. That makes it difficult to market the very effective heart products (such as hawthorn), which have a long history of use and even some clinical studies. The perception seems to be newer is better and older is no longer effective."

Although, others view the market more narrowly. "The market may seem broad in one sense, but heart-health issues really boil down to elevated blood pressure, lipid maintenance and inflammation," Tomc said. "A few nutrients added to a pure and potent fish oil can be enough to help many maintain health."

It's possible the market has a history of saturating specific terms, such as cholesterol, and ignoring other parts of heart health, as Dallas Clouatrite, Ph.D., Jarrow Formulas' consultant pointed out. "The breadth of the heart-health market is a bit deceptive because until recently the public health message has focused very tightly on cholesterol," he said. "In fact, blood pressure and

metabolic syndrome likely are much more important to overall health than are cholesterol levels. However, blood pressure typically is ignored until it reaches quite significant heights and poses a real threat to health. Blood pressure's importance has been given little play in relation to the cholesterol story. The same is true of blood sugar and insulin levels. More generally, the medical world is moving away from the cholesterol theory and toward treatment of inflammation."

The good news is, consumers are associating certain ingredients with heart health, thanks to companies such as Quaker Oats and Cheerios. And even though the heart-health category is vast, consumers like to ask questions, and that's where you, the retailer, comes in. You can help guide them in the right direction and get to the nitty gritty of their specific needs.