

Gut health can impact one's immune system, metabolism, allergies and sleep cycles, among others. Poor gut health has been known to increase an individual's predisposition to cancer, autoimmune diseases and even mental health. The importance of maintaining gut health is thus critical to a healthy population.

"Amid rapid economic growth and urbanisation, Chinese consumers are constantly faced with high-stress levels, lack of sleep and a diet high in processed food. This fast-paced lifestyle can damage the balance of bacteria in our gut and in turn affect the overall health of the population. The results of BENEEO's consumer survey show that Chinese consumers are taking action. They are seeking a diet high in prebiotic fibre to ensure the healthy function of the colon. For instance, yoghurt, pre- and probiotics and fibre-enriched foods, including cereals, are increasingly seen as products that have a positive impact on digestive health," said Myriam Snaet, Head of Market Intelligence & Consumer Insights, BENEEO.

Food manufacturers – a force for change

Consumers awareness that the benefits of a healthy digestive system reach out beyond the gut and impact overall health is continuously growing. Food manufacturers can cater to this growing demand for high fibre and natural food. For example, by using BENEEO's all-natural functional ingredients such as the prebiotic fibres from chicory root, manufacturers can improve the nutritional profile of their products and in turn, promote better gut health among consumers.

The chicory plant – an ancient vegetable – stores extra energy in its roots in the form of inulin. BENEEO's Orafiti® Inulin and Oligofructose, are derived from the chicory root through a gentle hot water extraction method. Inulin and oligofructose are two of the three scientifically proven prebiotics worldwide according to the International Scientific Association for Pro- and Prebiotics (ISAPP). In addition, they stand out in the market as the only existing prebiotics derived from plant sources.

Both Orafiti® Inulin and Oligofructose are prebiotic fibres that feed the good bacteria already existing in the gut. Numerous intervention studies have shown that Orafiti® Inulin and Oligofructose not only support the growth of beneficial intestinal bacteria, such as bifidobacteria and lactobacilli but also inhibit the development of certain potentially harmful bacteria.

These chicory root fibres appeal to food manufacturers as they can be easily incorporated into foods that we consume regularly such as chocolates, cereals, baking and dairy products. The best part is, despite its healthier and natural properties, manufacturers can still maintain the delicious taste of these food products. Another aspect of its appeal to manufacturers is the fact that inulin is the most used fibre in new product developments worldwide (Innova 2019).

A healthier future

China's booming economy has brought many benefits such as improved standards of living for its population. However, with rising disposable income, a growing middle class and busier lifestyles, many Chinese consumers are also more susceptible to unhealthy food culture.

Food manufacturers can, therefore, play a key role in helping consumers build a healthy lifestyle, beginning with their gut health. Incorporating Orafiti® Inulin and Oligofructose to the Chinese consumers' diet will provide healthier options to them, improving their digestive health and in the long term, the overall health of the population.