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Personalised nutrition should be race-specific

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As people turn to remedies to improve their digestive health, many ingredients and delivery formats are being offered to appeal to as many consumers as possible. Since digestive health problems are more prevalent among older consumers, they account for the majority of sales. While the traditional pill format remains the most popular, new products embracing alternative formats are starting to emerge within the industry. Recently, Priyanka Bajpai spoke to Dr Dilip Ghosh, Director, Nutriconnect about his views on the digestive health market in general as well as in Australia. Dr Dilip was at the Vitafoods Asia Conference 2018 talking on “Personalised Nutrition- Are we ready.”



The digestive health industry stands at approximately US$1 billion according to SPINS data, with popular ingredients such as probiotics, prebiotics and digestive enzymes making up a significant portion of the market.

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Excerpts from the interview-

Q.1. What do you mean by digestive health?

Digestive Health is a very broad term. Technically, it is a system of organs, starting from salivary glands to the rectum. It helps maintain our healthy nutrition. However, I prefer using the term gut health over digestive health, simply because gut is more responsible for our overall digestive health.

Q.2. What is the current digestive health situation in Asia? What are some of the more common conditions you come across?

Global digestive market is huge. If we look at the trends in the last 10 years, digestive health has always ranked in the top three trend setting markets. In Asia, as well as globally, the market is hugely fragmented because of enormous number of misleading claims which leads to confused consumers in regards to digestive health. Since there are a lot of organs and enzymes involved within the digestive system, it is not easy to manage gut health by own. Proper platforms are needed to guide the consumers to the right products, so that they make an educated and wise decision.

Q.3. Do you think we will be able to see much improvement in the digestive health status? What about the practice of gastroenterology in Australia?

If we start looking at the recent couple of years in terms of research trends, there is tremendous technology improvement in this area. For example, a Singapore based company launched a gut-metabolite based testing system recently and I trust it is revolutionary. However, we still have to look out at the robust science that has followed this product. Another example is that of MicroBiome, a Australia based company which has come up with a non-invasive product based on genomic testing. I think, the approach and direction of research is focussed now. It is vital that one should be vary of their actual health requirements before the practitioner can help and support you.

In Australia, there is a huge number of Ayurvedic and traditional practitioners, and the educational gap between consumers and nutritionists, doctors and gastroenterologists is bridging. Overall, the scenario looks fruitful and growing in the right direction.

Q.4. Many people rely on nutritional supplements as their first line of defence against health problems. In contrast, there is another line of thought emphasizing tending the ecology of a person's gut flora with food. According to you, which thought is proper?

I think, both thoughts have their pros and cons. First line of treatment according to me should never be a nutritional supplement. If you keep your gut well and healthy, many diseases can be avoided. Industry however never supports consumers to take health in their own hands. Medical sickness should not be taken lightly and should be under proper authorised supervision.

Q.5. Could you talk a little about personalised nutrition? How are ingredient companies taking that step further? How do they offer products that meet the needs of consumers on an individual level?

I have noticed that many probiotic companies make products which are very specific to a single demography and try to generalise in the overall population. Theoretically it might seem possible. However, there is a lot of research that has contested this approach.

In Japan, a lot of research is going to study their own microflora. Likewise, every community has different microflora with different cultural, food- habits, even genetics. Even the same species in Japanese gut and American gut might have varying microflora. The human body is very tricky and complicated. We have trillions of microbes in our gut with thousands of species residing in us. It is definitely not easy. Simplifying and generalising products to work on the overall population is going to be dangerous.

Personalised nutrition should not be individualised but should be race-specific. If we develop something catering to the gene pool, I am sure personalised nutrition will become more realistic and achievable.