

Beyond Digestion: The Future of Enzymes

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Enzymes have been around for more than a century, with a long history of healing digestive complaints of all types. Enzymes can influence nearly every chemical reaction that is part of the digestive process, from breaking down the foods we consume and making them more bioavailable, to helping alleviate food intolerances such as lactose or gluten intolerance, to assisting in combating heartburn and acid reflux issues. Today, aided by the growth of the gut health category as a whole, enzymes are enjoying a solid position in the digestive health supplement field, with increased consumer awareness, a heightened quality focus and an overall belief that enzymes can do the job.

While enzymes now have an established place on the digestive health shelf, they also have potential in a variety of non-digestive applications, where visibility is still low and opportunities are only just beginning to surface.

For instance, in the anti-inflammatory arena, enzymes can play a role in various joint and muscle health indications. Plenty of anecdotal historical evidence as well as documented studies support the use of primarily proteolytic enzymes in decreasing inflammation as well as muscle soreness after exercise.

Additionally, enzymes are gaining traction for cardiovascular health, where research coming out of Japan has shown increased blood circulation with the use of certain enzymes.

Enzymes are also playing a role in the treatment of autism-related issues, for immune system protection and for helping fight colds and viruses as well as stress.

As the industry considers the growth of the enzyme category and its potential for expansion beyond the digestive health category, an important point is the safety and efficacy of the ingredients. Consumers understand that they should “feel” enzymes working, and maintaining credibility with good quality, properly-functioning products is vital to the future success and growth of this segment of the industry. With the recently-passed GMP legislation – which goes into effect this June for the mid-sized companies that make up the bulk of this industry – first and foremost should be the question about whether raw material suppliers are GMP-certified.

Additionally, to further ensure end products are safe and efficacious, it is important to use non-GMO ingredients whenever possible. Lastly, microbiological contamination can be an issue and suppliers should be testing every batch for acceptable micro counts.

In summary, the industry is certainly working hard to move enzymes beyond their current digestive health niche. As consumers continue to search for alternative solutions to improving their health conditions, they are responding with strong support for the products that have the scientific backup and can prove their efficacy in use.