

# FUNCTIONAL INGREDIENTS IN CONFECTIONARY

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Enjoyment with a healthy additive is nowadays more in demand than ever before. There is a strong trend in confectionery towards functional products. An obsession with sweets, alongside a seemingly antithetical focus on health and wellness, has led to the evolution of the functional confectionery category, which Euromonitor International segments into three markets: medicated confectionery, fortified/functional gum and fortified/functional chocolate. Following the categories of functional foods and functional cosmetics (beauty foods), the new segment of functional confectionery is developing strongly. Historically this category has roots in typical cough & cold and sore throat remedies, but confectioneries are by no means limited to these and are currently looking to improve their image. Confectioneries are still often criticized as unhealthy products, requiring special marketing strategies. Benefits out of the botanical kingdom, when added to confectioneries, open up new opportunities here as they do in functional foods in general.

Herbs in particular are of rising importance to the confectionery industry. They have been used traditionally in throat-soothing candies and sweets for decades. Herbs add flavor to all food forms, including confectionery, and with their healthy image, they can also be considered "trendy" ingredients. Plus, their proven effectiveness can, in sufficient quantities, even add a medical function to a confectionery product.

The use of herbs in confectionery products range from throat, cough and sinus remedies, to digestive, dental/gum care and immune stimulation products. In addition, newly discovered benefits of traditional ingredients, such as the antioxidant power of the flavanols contained in chocolate, increase consumer appeal and move the segment away from its image of guilty indulgence and unhealthy calories. Many botanicals are used in food mostly to add different flavors. But that is not the only reason. Many spices have been known for their medicinal uses for hundreds of years, so it is not surprising that these usages are being confirmed by modern science. Spices such as ginger, chili and garlic have been used as main or sole constituents of drugs for some years now, and while confectionery products containing garlic may be somewhat rare, they do exist as ginger or chili blended with chocolate.

Other culinary herbs combine taste with functionality, such as mint, sage, thyme, rosemary, cumin, anise, fennel, coriander and the aforementioned ginger; they all have some in vitro anticancer effects. Herbs like rosemary, sage, oregano, thyme, onions and garlic act as antioxidants and protect from LDL oxidation, reducing the

risk for cardiovascular disease. Lemongrass, fenugreek, linseed and garlic help lower cholesterol, and ginger helps fight motion sickness.

These are just a few examples of the many known benefits to be derived from herbs. In confectioneries, they can fulfill a number of functions, ranging from energy/stimulation to mental/physical performance to oral and throat health.

Growing in popularity among consumers and product manufacturers, functional gums represent one of the most promising product areas. Xylitol and baking soda are among the most common ingredients in these gums, which are designed to offer oral health benefits. Fortified gums offer energy boost, smoking cessation, breath freshening, tooth whitening and calcium fortification. Concepts include immune defense, weight management, joint health, heart health and energy. According to the company, "Oral care will see an enhanced focus during 2011 as Gumlink, in collaboration with strong partners, will be able to market concepts with a pharmaceutical touch such as chlorhexidine, oral care probiotics, antacids and also a new concept that in terms of efficacy comes quite close to matching the good old toothbrush."

Delivering health benefits alongside exceptional taste has been a recipe for success in the functional foods market. Chocolate offers a unique opportunity to provide that profitable combination. Chocolate is a natural vehicle for health due to its naturally occurring cocoa flavonols. Dark chocolate is growing at a higher rate than milk chocolate products because consumers have learned there are higher flavonol levels in dark than milk. Regular consumption of the cocoa flavonols found in Acticoa can help strengthen the body's natural resistance to environmental stressors; maintain cardiovascular health, including helping to maintain blood pressure, blood circulation and cholesterol at healthy levels; help maintain skin health, including increased skin elasticity and hydration as well as protection from the harmful effects of ultraviolet (UV) radiation caused by regular exposure to the sun. Companies are also adding protein and fiber to chocolate in order to satisfy consumer cravings for healthier products. For example, Mars' Snickers brand launched its Marathon Protein Bar in October 2010. Caramel Nut Rush (20 grams of protein) and Chocolatey Nut Burst (21 grams of protein) are both an "excellent source" of fiber (10 grams) and are low glycemic (index is 26).

Looking to add value to their confectionery products, many companies have started using real fruit or fruit juice ingredients as well as trendy superfruits. For example, Jelly Belly Superfruit Mix Jelly Beans feature Acai Berry, Barbados Cherry, Cranberry, Blueberry and Pomegranate flavors. The functional confectionery segment is one with strong potential. Since the idea of adding ingredients with tangible benefits has already been brought to consumers' attention through functional

foods in general, functional confectionery products do not require strong consumer education. Thus, the market is ripe for more innovative products.

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