

# Packaging Good Health

*When it comes to health-oriented products, it's not only what's inside that counts*

Consumers today are more concerned and educated about their health than ever before, and they're determined to take an active role in safeguarding it. New health-enhancing food products hit the market every day, but is there also a role for packaging to play in this growing trend?

"At first glance, the packaging hardly seems relevant to the health of the consumer," says Carol Zweep, manager of Packaging Services at the Guelph Food Technology Centre, technical and training consultants in Guelph, Ont. "But there are many functions it can play."

## FIRST, DO NO HARM

Consumers are paying closer attention to packaging and its effect on food. While it is true that abusing packaging, such as subjecting it to very high temperatures, can release harmful components, packaging that comes into contact with food must be approved in Canada by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) and in the U.S. by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). "Packaging manufacturers are constantly working to ensure that the packaging materials they devise are as safe as possible," says Zweep.

## KEEP THE GOOD STUFF GOOD

Read any cereal boxes lately? They often point out that the liner contains BHA and BHT to protect freshness. This is the priority for packaging: protecting the product inside from the damaging effects of the outside environment. "For example, oxygen ingress can lead to degradation of vitamin C levels," explains Zweep. "If you're marketing your product based on its vitamin C content, this is not just a minor protective function. Active packaging, such as oxygen scavengers, can help extend shelf life. Other methods also preserve health-enhancing vitamins, minerals, omega-3 fatty acids, and other delicate components, from oxygen, light and other degrading factors."

## INFORMATION SOURCE

One of the most obvious ways consumers derive health benefits from packaging is in the explicit declarations of health claims, nutrient content claims and Nutrition Facts panels right on the label. "Consumers may distrust health claims, but they read the Nutrition Facts panel closely, and trust it because they know it is government regulated," says Carol Culhane, president of International Food Focus

Group Limited, a business development consulting company based in Toronto. "Consumers are also paying attention to additional health-related, on-package information, such as the Health Check symbol from the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and the glycemic index ratings which can appear on product labels in Australia," says Culhane. "Consumers are hungry for food-specific health information."

## NUTRITIONAL INNOVATION

Packaging can also enhance the nutritional value of a product. For example, Brain Twist's Defense Vitamin & Mineral Supplement beverage is packaged using FreshCan technology to preserve vitamins and minerals until the moment the beverage is consumed. The pressure in the FreshCan container drops upon opening, causing a wedge inside the package to open, releasing the supplements directly into the beverage. *Et voilà!*

ScentSational Technologies takes a different approach with a method that adds flavour without adding calories, fat, sodium, sugar, or other undesirable extras. Their patented Encapsulated Aroma Release technology incorporates flavours directly into the packaging to be released into the food or beverage product.

## HEALTH OF THE PLANET

At a time when the planet is groaning under the weight of all the garbage that is produced daily in the Western world, packaging manufacturers are finding ways to lessen the impact. "Recycling continues to be a challenge when different plastics are mixed together, and when consumers don't participate," says Zweep. "However, there are people taking a very creative approach to the problem. Vancouver's EPI Environmental Plastics' Totally Degradable Plastic Additive (TDPA) can be used in existing packaging, so it still functions normally, and when subjected to the right trigger, breaks down, leaving only carbon dioxide, water and a small amount of non-toxic material," she adds. "In another direction, eliminating the need for petrochemical source material is NatureWorks' poly-lactyl acid, or PLA, made from corn, a renewable resource, and resulting in 'corn-tainers.'"

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*Cliona Reeves is Communications manager at Guelph, Ont.'s Guelph Food Technology Centre ([www.gfic.ca](http://www.gfic.ca)).*