

# ENTER THE AGE OF OLESTRA

**P**harmacists may soon see their store shelves stocked with new fat-free snacks featuring olestra, the calorie-free fat substitute developed by the Procter & Gamble Co., Cincinnati. The Food & Drug Administration recently approved P&G's petition to use olestra in snacks such as potato chips, corn chips, tortilla chips, and crackers. Olestra, which will be sold under the brand name Olean, is the first fat replacer that can be used to fry foods.

Procter & Gamble believes that olestra can help people stick to a low-fat diet, because olestra offers



them a way to reduce fat without sacrificing taste. A typical 1-oz. bag of potato chips contains 150 calories and 10 grams of fat; a 1-oz. bag of potato chips made with olestra contains about 70 calories and 0 grams of fat.

Many are excited by the possibility of enjoying their favorite snacks without feeling guilty about fat intake. However, others are concerned that this fat-free pleasure may take a nutritional toll.

The Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI) has cited studies concluding that olestra can decrease the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K and carotenoids from other foods eaten at the same time as olestra. CSPI also said that olestra can cause gastrointestinal problems.

Procter & Gamble acknowledged the fact that heavy snackers could experience bloating and stool changes. The company said it plans to include packaging information similar to that posted on high-fiber foods regarding digestive effects. However, P&G maintained that olestra will not exacerbate disease in people with disorders of the gastrointestinal tract. The company suggested that people cut back on their consumption of the product if they experience any digestive problems after eating large amounts of olestra.

## Does this fat replacer sap vitamins as well as guilt?

P&G did admit that olestra can cause a decrease in absorption of fat-soluble vitamins for heavy snackers. To combat this effect, P&G plans to fortify snacks with vitamins A, D, E, and K. However,

the company does not plan to do the same with carotenoids. In a press release, P&G said that "the effect of Olean on carotenoids is well within normal variations of carotenoid levels. It is similar to the effect of other common foods on carotenoids."

The CSPI vehemently disagreed with P&G's characterization of Olean's effect on carotenoids as harmless. "Because it robs the body of disease-fighting nutrients, olestra has been called a public-health time bomb. Today, [FDA] Commissioner Kessler has lit the fuse," said Michael Jacobsen, Ph.D., CPSI executive director.

P&G stood by the integrity of its product, saying that olestra has been tested during the past 25 years in more than 150 long- and short-term studies. P&G maintained that research has shown that olestra is neither absorbed nor metabolized, nor does it cause cancer, birth defects, or reproductive effects. The company also said that olestra does not affect the efficacy of lipid-soluble drugs.

**Karyn Snyder**

## Aspirin shows sales pickup as consumers return to basics

**K**etoprofen products have joined the ranks of countless branded and private-label OTC analgesics. Pharmacy shelves are stocked with a plethora of acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and naproxen sodium tablets and caplets, all available in different strengths and sizes. Despite all of these choices in pain relievers, many consumers are opting to buy a remedy that has been around for nearly 100 years: aspirin.

It is too soon to tell how ketoprofen will affect the analgesic market, but some interesting things occurred in the category during 1995. Information Resources Inc., a Chicago-based research company, reported that aspirin sales grew during the last year, while sales of acetaminophen and ibuprofen decreased. In fact, IRI reported that growth of the analgesic category declined by .5%, while total year-to-

date aspirin sales (Dec. 17, 1995) increased 1.6%, or \$8.5 million. On the other hand, total year-to-date (Dec. 17, 1995) sales of ibuprofen decreased 1.7%, or \$10.7 million. Acetaminophen sales suffered the most, dropping 6.6%, or \$68.2 million.

Newcomer naproxen sodium demonstrated growth of 83.5%, or \$62 million. However, the numbers do not reflect a full-year to full-year comparison as they do for the other analgesics because the product was introduced in June 1994.

Perhaps volume share is a better measure of the market. IRI reported that aspirin accounted for 35.3%; acetaminophen for 33.8%; ibuprofen for 26.7%; and naproxen sodium for 3.5%.

Why have people returned to aspirin, the very first analgesic? "One reason is that aspirin continues to be researched for new uses. There is continual news on

how aspirin can benefit consumers in prevention of heart attacks, strokes, and colon cancer," said Michelle Priefer, product manager for Bayer Aspirin.

Ron Hunt, an associate in Coopers & Lybrand's Integrated Health Care Consulting Practices, agreed that the disease prevention benefits may have contributed to aspirin's recent growth. However, Hunt believes that people have returned to aspirin for its health benefits rather than its ability as a pain reliever. "There is definitely a segment of the population using aspirin for pain relief, as a fever reducer and for its anti-inflammatory effect, but people are using it less and less for these reasons. I don't have any numbers, but I'd be surprised if there were a huge number of people switching back to aspirin because they haven't been satisfied with the other products on the market," said Hunt.

Why else could people be switching back to aspirin? "The second reason people are turning to aspirin is the publicity about acetaminophen's negative effects on the liver when used in conjunction with alcohol," said Priefer, referring to a lawsuit a plaintiff won in late December against the maker of Tylenol.

Hunt agreed that the negative publicity may have impacted acetaminophen sales to a degree, but he also believes that the introduction of new products in the category may have stolen some of acetaminophen's thunder.

But what about the risks involved with taking aspirin? This analgesic has long had a reputation for causing stomach upset and aggravating ulcers. "Less than 6% of the population cannot take aspirin because of stomach upset," claimed Priefer. "While a significant number of people may think they suffer from this, it's a perception that's out of line with reality."

How will new analgesics like ketoprofen affect aspirin sales? While Hunt feels other pain relievers such as acetaminophen, ibuprofen, and naproxen sodium may feel the heat, he doesn't believe the introduction of ketoprofen products will significantly impact aspirin sales. He thinks ketoprofen will probably steal shares proportionately from different segments of the analgesic market, but he does not think the same will hold true for the aspirin segment.

"Ketoprofen will take proportionately less from aspirin because a significant

percentage of aspirin is used for health benefits. It couldn't take away from that volume. It would be taking away from the volume of aspirin being used mainly for pain relief," said Hunt.

Priefer thinks an aging population may result in increasing interest in and sales of aspirin. "A lot of people are reaching the age when prevention is a concern and are taking aspirin on a regimen basis," said Priefer.

She did admit, however, that the makers of aspirin experience difficulty reaching a younger audience. In her opinion, parents of young children may not take aspirin because they just take whatever they administer to their children. She also believes there is a generation of people who grew up taking aspirin-free pain relievers when their parents learned of the dangers of giving aspirin to children.

However, all is not lost, said Priefer. "This is an era in which people want to get back to the basics. MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] just did a survey in which they asked people which inventions they couldn't do without. Aspirin was ranked No. 4," said Priefer.

**Karyn Snyder**

## STOCK CHECKER

### H<sub>2</sub> BLOCKERS LEADING THE CHARGE IN ANTACID SALES

*D. P. Hamacher & Associates Inc., a Milwaukee-based management consulting company specializing in drugstore management tools, provided the material for this column. For further information, call the Hamacher firm at 1-(800) 888-0889.*

**A**ntacid category sales were up more than 15%, to \$1.3 billion for the year ending Nov. 30, 1995, according to Information Resources Inc., a Chicago-based research company. Drugstore sales were up 11.8%, to \$513.9 million.

Behind these dramatic increases were the long-awaited Rx-to-OTC switches of two prominent prescription H<sub>2</sub> blockers,

Pepcid and Tagamet. By the end of November, Pepcid AC had chalked up sales of \$103.5 million and gained an antacid market share of 8.2%. At the same time, Tagamet HB held a 4.3% market share, with sales of \$54.3 million. Together, the two brands seized the top seven antacid dollar sales rankings in drugstores for the 13 weeks ending Nov. 26. When you consider that Pepcid AC Tablets—the first over-the-counter H<sub>2</sub> blocker on the market—did not ship until June, these figures are even more impressive.

Another mark of rapid consumer acceptance of OTC H<sub>2</sub> blockers is that sales of larger sizes are increasing rapidly, which indicates that consumers are repur-

chasing the products. The introduction of Zantac 75 in March 1996 is sure to propel sales of OTC H<sub>2</sub> blockers even further. As a prescription drug, Zantac had sales of \$2.2 billion, compared with \$538 million for Pepcid and \$458 million for Tagamet.

Another reason to expect big sales increases is the level of promotional support manufacturers have promised for the three brands in their first year—\$100 million each for Pepcid AC and Tagamet HB, and \$75 million for Zan-

#### ANTACID NEW ITEMS

Product	Manufacturer
Gas-X Softgel X/S 10, 30	Sandoz Consumer Pharmaceutical Division
Lactaid Caplet X/S 24, 50	McNeil Consumer Products Co.
Maalox Liquid Cap 24, 48	Rhône-Poulenc Rorer
Pepcid AC Tablet 6, 12, 18, 30	Johnson & Johnson Merck
Tagamet HC Tablet 16, 32, 48, 64	SmithKline Beecham
Zantac 75 Tablet 4, 10, 20	Warner Wellcome Consumer Health Products