

# 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