

A natural boost

A growing body of evidence suggests that traditional energy drinks have serious health repercussions, with many containing excessive amounts of sugar, caffeine and artificial ingredients. The race is on for beverage manufacturers to boost their drinks with clean label ingredients that offer health-conscious consumers a steady release of energy without the spikes and crashes. FoodBev takes a look at the products breathing new life into this category.

Last year, the UK government announced plans to restrict the promotion and placement of unhealthy food and beverages in supermarkets, arguing that products high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) were contributing to the obesity crisis. After a short hiatus, the new regulations are set to come into force in October 2022.

Traditional energy drinks are often criticised for their high levels of sugar and caffeine, with frequent consumption linked to headaches, sleep problems, alcohol use, smoking and increased irritability.

Despite health concerns, energy drinks remain a popular choice for those wanting to beat the daily slump. However, with consumers becoming more aware of what they put into their bodies, energy drinks must cater to the demand for natural, clean label ingredients that reduce the spikes and crashes associated with traditional products.

Vicky Berry, European business development manager at Synergy Flavours, told *FoodBev*: "The energy drinks market has really evolved in recent years, and caters to a number of different

consumers who have different needs. There are gym-goers looking for protein-packed drinks with long lists of functional ingredients, alongside consumers who want a natural energy boost without caffeine."

She continued: "The last few years have also seen a shift in working behaviours, with an increasing number of people working from home and working longer hours, which means that many seek the additional benefits of cognitive performance and eye health from energy drinks to help them concentrate when sitting at a computer all day".

Berry notes that, within such a rapidly growing market, the challenge for brands is "keeping up with consumer demands, and making sure that their products deliver on the need for natural while still providing the functional benefits that these consumers are seeking".

Energising ingredients

Natural energy drinks are typically free from artificial sweeteners, flavours and colours. Popular caffeine replacements include guarana, kola nuts, green tea, guayusa, green coffee, yerba mate and ginseng.

"Beverages based on green coffee, green tea and guarana are all coming to the fore," Berry said. "Interestingly, many brands are also moving away from caffeine and focusing instead on fortifying their beverages with B vitamins and electrolytes."

Britvic-owned Purdey's has released Rejuvenate, a beverage boosted with ginseng and B vitamins to create an energising lift. "The blend of B vitamins allows [Purdey's] to highlight that vitamins B2, B3, B6 [and] B12 contribute to normal energy-yielding metabolism and reduction of tiredness and fatigue," said Berry.

Magda Peake, applications technologist at Treatt, agreed, adding: "Natural energy drink producers pack their beverages with other functional ingredients to help minimise any potential crash effect".

"A few examples include ingredients such as vitamins (eg. vitamin B3, B5, B6) and antioxidants (eg. vitamin C, acai berry)," she said.

These energising ingredients offer consumers a wide range of benefits, from decreasing appetite and burning fat cells to speeding up metabolism and aiding weight loss, as Peake suggests. "Some of these ingredients are said to improve energy levels, blood circulation, help indigestion and boost alertness, focus and even brain power – as well as offer anti-inflammatory properties," she said.





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"Guayusa, for example, can reportedly help decrease the risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes if consumed regularly."

Sweetened, naturally

Reducing high-sugar content is another key focus for natural energy drink producers.

Treatt offers a range of health and wellness products that Peake claims can help to increase the sweetness perception and impart a real sugar taste in formulations.

"They can be used in recipes with high impact sweeteners [and] low-sugar/sugar-free options, as well as being able to negate some of the possible negative attributes that are associated with some functional ingredients," she said.

Meanwhile, Synergy is also looking into sugar alternatives. "In this space, we are starting to see stevia as the preferred sweetener over the likes of sucralose, acesulfame potassium and aspartame, which are often used in energy drinks," said Berry.

She added: "Brands are also focusing on more natural cues – ie. with the addition of fruit juice and natural flavours...We are also seeing energy drinks brands with enhanced claims alongside the natural positioning, focusing on factors like cognitive performance, functioning of the immune system and mental wellness."

Manufacturers and brands that replace the caffeine and sugar content of traditional energy drinks with natural, clean label ingredients are sure to give this sector the boost it needs. Taste and flavour profiles will take this growing category even further, adding value and enabling brands to stand out from the crowd. That said, 'energy drink' may no longer be a suitable enough claim, as consumers seek out functional and health labelling that meets their overall wellness needs. ●



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