



Having it All: Supplements for Women

A perennially proactive health consumer group, women continue to seek products that empower all areas of their health.

By Lisa Schofield

Although men and women can have numerous health issues in common, the Institute of Medicine states that “every cell has a sex” and that sex-based differences impact all bodily functions, tissues and organs, say authors Mary-Lou Pardue and Theresa Wizemann, editors of *Exploring the Biological Contributions to Human Health: Does Sex Matter?*

Women account for up to 80 percent of consumer purchasing decision in health care, according to the U.S. Department of Labor’s “General facts on women and job-based health.”

When considering these factors together, a picture of tremendous fresh opportunities for producing relevant products for natural health-minded women emerges. “Women of all ages are more youthful, energetic and empowered than ever,” observed Annie Eng, CEO, HP Ingredients, Florida. “Even in their 80s today, they are pursuing wellness, staying active and trying new activities, hobbies and indulging in personal growth—so focusing on helping to fulfill women’s wellness goals

is more timely than ever.”

The market is different in key areas than it was only a few years ago. John Quilter, vice president of global portfolio proactive health for Kerry (Ireland), noted that one significant change has been a shift to a more holistic approach. He commented, “There’s a greater understanding that a woman’s health needs go beyond her physical condition to encompass her overall well-being. And, of course, those needs change over her lifetime, as she navigates age-related shifts in the body.”

In the viewpoint of Tracey Seipel, ND, CEO, Seipel Group, Queensland, Australia, the women’s natural health product market has expanded in the past five years with more female-targeted rather than general formulations. Products for more personal/private female symptoms have emerged such as adaptogens for mood pre- and post-natal and more specific menopausal supplements.

She said, “Key areas of women’s health that have been neglected in the past are starting to gain traction. For example, incontinence and poor bladder

control affects one in three adult women.” Surveys of younger women and menopausal women show poor bladder control is a top health concern—yet, she clarified, five or more years ago it would be difficult to find a product line that included a bladder control formula. The only bladder support for women widely available focused on urinary tract infection (UTI).

Seipel added, “Sales data is also showing that bladder control is now a leading growth category in the supplement space. This highlights the evolution of the women’s natural health product market, moving from a general/generic approach to specific health concerns for women.”

Similarly, pointed out Franziska Weichmann, manager of scientific communications and product development at Switzerland-based Horphag Research (exclusive worldwide supplier of Pycnogenol), some sources show that previously stigmatized topics like fertility, menstrual health, menopause and postpartum depression are gaining mainstream recognition and fueling the growth of the



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women's health market.

According to the report, "Changing the Conversation on Women's Wellbeing" by Baird Women's Health & Wellness Showcase, brands that sell women's wellness products "are pushing the boundaries of conversation on their platforms and creating spaces, communities and resources for women to learn, share stories and support one another through complex experiences unique to being a woman."

There are those who believe that the women's natural health market can indeed witness improvement and tremendous growth. According to Niki Kennedy, director of insights & content, Glanbia Nutritionals (Chicago, IL), this market is in "its infancy in terms of consumer understanding, technology and offerings."

Women's health needs, she noted, have been somewhat ignored and a strong example she provides is sports nutrition, where male performance, both from academic knowledge as well as product offerings, has been the core of the market. "Female focused sports nutrition (SN) brands are successfully bringing taboo health challenges out from under the table but those looking

to cater to female athletes should harness technology to provide the power of knowledge," stated Nick Morgan, founder of U.K.-based Nutrition Integrated.

The Childbearing Years

Of course, a significant part of a woman's life is having children, and although a CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) report in May 2021 "Births: Provisional Data for 2020" showed that there was a 20 percent decline in women giving birth in 2020 compared to 2007, this is still a relevant market to focus on. The report showed that for every 1,000 women of childbearing age (late teens to 44), 55.8 percent of them gave birth in 2020, compared to 69.5 percent in 2007.

In the United States, the average age of women giving birth for the first time is in the 30s, cited Ståle Søvting, sales and marketing director, VivoMega, Norway. "Fortunately for these women, health science has progressed dramatically over the last 20 years, meaning that women desiring to become mothers have many more resources at hand to potentially improve the health of themselves and the baby during pregnancy," he said. "This includes responsibility also being placed on the father to maintain good health, because he may need to improve sperm concentration and motility for better fertility."

But for many women who want to be mothers (through their own pregnancy, not adoption), one of the most com-

mon causes of the inability to become pregnant easily is polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS). Further, noted Quilter, "this can have a huge emotional impact on women and their families."

EAs remain crucial for healthy fetal development, and for the mother. The recently issued statement from the International Society for the Study of Fatty Acids and Lipids (ISSFAL) supports the important role for omega-3s for lower pre-term birth risks, according to Søvting. "ISSFAL's statement noted that a DHA plus EPA dose of 1,000 mg per day is effective at reducing the risk of early birth," he commented. VivoMega omega-3 concentrates, he added, exceed GOED and IFOS 5 Star purity standards.

According to Quilter, Kerry's ProActive Health Caronositol Fertility, an extract ingredient combining a patented ratio of Myo-inositol & D-chiro-inositol for women with fertility problems associated with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), helps improve fertility in women of reproductive age suffering from PCOS. It helps to increase the rate of embryonic implantation when PCOS is present and supports the treatment of symptoms related to the syndrome.

High stress and some lifestyle behaviors can impede fertility, as well as fetal development. "Providing solutions that help women get their bodies and minds fit for pregnancy can allow brands to connect with consumers, gain trust early on in their maternal health journey, and provide long-lasting benefits to their

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overall health and wellness," said Kennedy.

Seipel related that women seeking to start a family are now looking more proactively into investing in their and their partner's health much more than previous generations. Key areas of concern, she said, include maintaining energy, sleep, mood, bladder, physical appearance, exercise and fitness, as well as reproductive health. Younger women are turning to obtaining information from influencers. "So here is an opportunity for supplement companies to be more proactive in educating this group with quality and accessible information," she commented.

Many new mothers may experience a downside to feeding their newborns, pointed out Quilter. In breastfeeding mothers, mastitis is a condition that can turn one of the most joyous times of life into one of the most difficult. Mastitis is

an inflammation of the breast, occurring in approximately 15 percent of mothers who are breastfeeding, most commonly within the first 12 weeks—but it can occur at any stage of lactation, including in the second year. Mastitis can make lactation difficult and, in some cases, lead to the cessation of breastfeeding.

He explained that Kerry's Hereditum LC40 Breastcare helps to promote and maintain natural breastfeeding. LC40 includes *Lactobacillus fermentum* CECT5716, the first patented probiotic strains isolated from woman breast milk, specifically formulated for women who are breastfeeding. It has been clinically shown to help prevent premature cessation of breastfeeding due to mastitis.

For women in their 20s and 30s, Pycnogenol supplementation may benefit menstrual cramps and UTIs, according

to Weichmann. A 2021 study found Pycnogenol to be effective at reducing the number of urinary tract infection episodes, increasing the number of infection-free and symptom-free patients, and decreasing oxidative stress in patients with UTIs. Another study showed that Pycnogenol supplementation reduced pain during menstruation, which was reflected by a significant reduction of NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs) used.

Women in this age group who engage in intense athletic and fitness routines tend to have unique supplementation needs, according to Kennedy. A 2021 review of the nutritional needs of female athletes has brought to life a practical approach to begin formulating products specific for female athletes. A portion from the abstract characterizes why this type of research is so important, Kennedy emphasized. The authors write, "Sex-specific nutritional recommendations and guidelines for the active female and female athlete have been lacking to date and warrant further consideration."



"Emerging evidence underscores the importance of a nutritional strategy for active females throughout their lifecycle. The sports nutrition market lacks focus in this area with only 0.6 percent of global sports nutrition product launches targeting women," she commented.

Glanbia's FerriUp is a whey protein concentrate that naturally contains abundant levels of lactoferrin, vitamin B12 and 80 percent protein, providing a strong nutrient foundation that supports iron modulation, energy levels and immune health for active women, according to Kennedy.

Another issue often experienced by women of childbearing age is imbalances in vaginal microflora, which can result in candidiasis. Many women experience more than four bouts in a year.

Quebec, Canada-based Lallemand Health Solutions' ROSELLA L. plantarum P17630 (Proge 17630), is a unique strain isolated from a healthy vaginal flora with full mechanistic and clinical evidence of efficacy on a wide spectrum of benefits, from helping to maintain proper vaginal balance, including from oral intake, to being used for recurrent vulvovaginal candidiasis, according to a company white paper.

This probiotic strain has been studied in more than 800 women in six clinical trials, including two by oral supplementation. Whether alone or in combination with anti-fungals, participants saw an improvement in candidiasis with a reduction in symptoms such as swelling, redness, burning or itching. Proge 17630 also helped reduce the risk of recurrence of this candidiasis.

ROSELLA has been shown to adhere and interfere with *Candida albicans* and



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vaginal colonization and persistence following oral ingestion with a dose of 5B CFU/day. According to the company, ROSELLA restores flora diversity associated with a healthy vaginal flora and promotes vaginal diversity associated with a healthy vaginal microbiota by normalizing pH.

Peri-menopausal Focus

This state is a long period of transition, where fertility declines (but spontaneous pregnancy can still occur) and is common in women in their 40s and early 50s.

"Women today are more emboldened to acknowledge their peri-menopausal symptoms," observed Marianne McDonagh, vice president of sales, Bioenergy Life Science, Minnesota. "They are doing more to understand why these symptoms happen and how they can regain their personal equilibrium. Further, they are discovering what their mothers probably did not know. They're learning that many of their top concerns—fatigue, weight gain, insomnia, loss of libido—are due to extreme changes in hormones triggered by significant increases in cortisol levels."

McDonagh explained that levels of ATP and NAD as well as glutathione (GSH) decline in women with age, impacting the body's ability to respond to and manage stress. Two human clinical studies demonstrated that RiaGev-FEM simultaneously supports NAD+ metabolism, ATP and GSH while decreasing circulating cortisol levels in the body. "A unique, patented combination of Bioenergy Ribose and Nicotinamide, RiaGev-FEM has been studied on women and clinically proven to naturally lower cortisol levels without side effects. This makes it more effective at alleviating symptoms of women's hormonal fluctuations," she said.

Today's peri-menopausal women are generally still feeling young enough and most certainly not "middle aged." But things are changing and every peri-menopausal woman experiences symptoms uniquely, as some of those symptoms also impact attitude, outlook and mental acuity, as well as physical symptoms such as hot flashes and weight gain.

"As the global population of women aged 50-plus continues to increase, need states relating to the perimenopause and menopause have become more urgent," said Quilter. "Some of the most common concerns are hot flashes, mood swings and the cessation of men-

struation. The perimenopause, which can last several years can also affect emotional, mental and social well-being."

Increases in life expectancy have boosted the worldwide peri-menopausal and menopausal population, but innovation in women's health has increased the opportunities for products with ingredients that can help women make the most of this life stage.

There is tremendous opportunity in this niche, as according to a 2021 survey from brand Bonafide's State of Menopause Study, 73 percent of women don't treat their menopause symptoms.

Additionally, approximately one-third (29 percent) of respondents admitted they never sought out information or research about menopause prior to experiencing symptoms. And 45 percent of women did not know the difference between peri-menopause and menopause itself.

Weichmann commented, "Women today who are in the perimenopausal phase differ from previous generations as they have access to more information than ever. They can conduct more research on their condition and the options to manage it. While there are numerous symptoms associated with the



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perimenopause phase, the most common concerns today among this group are hot flashes, sleep disruption, depression and vaginal dryness.

Seipel pointed out that as few as 15-20 years ago women would take four to six years to transition to menopause. "Now it is taking eight, 10 or even 15 years. Peri-menopause can start from late 30 with menopausal symptoms ending in their seventies."

Menopause Market Grows

According to a November 2022 report from market research firm Grand View Research Inc., the global menopause market size will be worth \$24.4 billion by 2030, with a CAGR of 5.29 percent. Authors of the report assert that "Increasing awareness regarding menopause-associated health aspects, rising prevalence of post-menopausal syndrome and high adoption of women's health apps are expected to boost market growth during the forecast period." Dietary supplements take the lion's share of the market and growth, according to the report.

New from HP Ingredients is Nu Femme a unique herbal blend of *Eurycoma longifolia* and *Labisia pumila*, studied for its effective impact on reducing hot flashes and improving quality of life, as well as promoting healthy hormone and lipid profiles in peri-menopausal and menopausal women, Eng reported.

"Active menopausal women have a selection of supplementation that they can tailor for their specific health concerns, whether that be mobility, cognitive, urinary or other," said Seipel. "We have evolved from individual ingredients for only hot flashes to comprehensive supplements that together, address

the full range of menopausal symptoms."

She added that the five symptoms consistently reported by menopausal women are hot flashes, night sweats, incontinence/bladder control, poor sleep and depression/mood swings. Women in this age group are also concerned about bone, muscle and collagen loss, heart health and maintaining quality of life as well as weight control, energy and maintaining a healthy appearance and healthy aging.

Pycnogenol French maritime pine bark extract, noted Weichmann, has been found through several studies to improve all peri- and menopausal symptoms, including hot flashes and nightly sweating, menstrual discomfort, memory and concentration problems, anxiety, sleep problems, depression and others—and it has been proven to have no impact on hormonal levels.

A 2017 study found that perimenopausal women who supplemented with Pycnogenol saw a significant reduction of cardiovascular risk marker, homocysteine. Another study on perimenopausal women found that all climacteric symptoms improved with Pycnogenol. Climacteric symptoms were evaluated by the Women's Health Questionnaire (WHQ). Skin health is also a top concern amongst this age group. A 2012 study examined 20 healthy women, aged 55-68 years in which Pycnogenol increased hyaluronic acid production in skin by increasing hyaluronic acid synthase by 44 percent, reduced skin fatigue by 30 percent and increased skin elasticity by 25 percent.

Older women (and women who gave birth) may experience urinary incontinence and overactive bladder, according to Seipel, who noted that urinary incontinence affects one in three women and is consistently in the top three to five health concerns. A 2018 study showed that supplementation with Seipel Group's Urox can produce statistically significant reductions across the spectrum of bladder control symptoms including urinary incontinence, urgency, frequency and noctu-

ria. Urox is a clinically researched, patented blend of *Crateva nurvala*, *Equisetum arvense* and *Lindera aggregata*.

Research of Urox supplementation, she said, shows that up to 90 percent of trial participants had a statistically significant reduction in both stress and urgency urinary incontinence, urinary urgency, frequency, nocturia and diaper usage with statistically significant improvements in quality of life; and Urox works with results observed from two weeks of use.

Opportunities are, well, fertile, for product development for women's health—in all life stages.

Over the last five to 10 years, women have been finding their voices and are growing more confident in expressing what it is they need," said Søfting. "Whether it's the onset of puberty, pregnancy, menopause or something in between, women are demanding products and services that help elevate their standard of living. The nutraceuticals industry is ready to answer the call and deliver products that address brain health, stress, beauty, immunity and more by turning to mother nature's recipes." **NIE**

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