

New natural-fiber supplement

There's a new 100-percent natural fiber supplement in the market that makes taking fiber a lot easier. Benefiber, a product of Swiss health-care company Novartis, was launched in the Philippines recently by Novartis Healthcare Philippines. Benefiber powder contains 100-percent natural soluble fiber that can help promote a healthy digestive system.

Joseph O'Neill, commercial director for Novartis Consumer Health OTC business unit for Philippines and Singapore, said Benefiber is a healthy lifestyle choice and a natural way to integrate more fiber into one's daily diet.

And it is easy to take. Benefiber can be mixed with soft foods and noncarbonated beverages without altering their taste and consistency, he said. It can even be used for cooking. It does not contain sugar and grit, does not thicken in food or liquid, and dissolves quickly when mixed with noncarbonated drinks or soft food. Each serving provides three grams of dietary fiber.

Dietary fiber refers to the edible parts of plants or carbohydrate foods that cannot be digested. It is obtained mainly from plant foods—fruits, vegetables, grains, nuts, seeds and legumes.



HEALTHY

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Dietary fiber is an essential part of a healthy diet and has many health benefits, said Dr. Rosario Acosta, a clinical-nutrition specialist.

"A high-fiber diet is indispensable to fitness and health. I encourage all Filipinos to make fiber-rich foods a regular part of their daily meals," said Cynthia Carrion, undersecretary for sports, tourism, and wellness at the Department of Tourism. A health and fitness advocate, Carrion is a recipient of the Personal Trainer of the Year award given at the 26th IDEA World Fitness Convention last August in California.

There are two forms of fiber—soluble and insoluble. Soluble fiber slows down digestion and helps the small intestines absorb nutrients from food. Among the foods high in soluble fiber are dried beans, oats, oat bran, rice bran, barley, citrus fruits, apples, strawberries, peas and potatoes.

Insoluble fiber adds bulk to stool, helping it to pass more quickly through the large intestines. Wheat bran, whole grains, cereals, seeds and the skins of many fruits and vegetables contain high amounts of insoluble fiber. **M**

Gsk to donate H1N1 vaccines to WHO

LONDON

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) said it will donate 50 million doses of its swine flu vaccine to the World Health Organization (WHO) to distribute to developing countries. The drug company is working with the WHO and health authorities to deliver initial shipments of the H1N1 vaccine by the end of November, it said in a statement.



"GSK is committed to supporting governments and health authorities around the world in their efforts to protect their populations against this pandemic," said GSK chief executive Andrew Witty.

WHO director general Dr. Margaret Chan welcomed the "very generous donation." "This is a real gesture of global solidarity towards those who would not otherwise be able to have access to the vaccine. WHO will now work to see that these vaccines are distributed to those who need them," she said.

GSK has also agreed to sell the vaccine to developing countries at a reduced price, the company said, and is in talks with the WHO about a donation of its antiviral medicine, Relenza. **M AFP**

Merck acquires Schering-Plough

WASHINGTON

United States pharmaceutical giant Merck & Co. finalized its acquisition of rival Schering-Plough on November 3, a US\$41-billion deal creating the number two firm in the sector. The completion follows clearance from regulatory authorities in various countries, allowing the two companies to begin combined operations.

The combined firm will have annual revenues of US\$47 billion, behind US rival Pfizer, which following its acquisition of Wyeth has annual sales of around US\$75 billion dollars.

The deal announced in March is the latest tie-up of big drug makers facing increased cost pressures as key patents expire.

Merck expects to achieve cost savings of approximately US\$3.5 billion dollars annually beyond 2011 as a result of the transaction. The two firms already had a joint venture to market the anticholesterol drugs Vytorin and Zeita.

Executives said the combined company will have a more diverse portfolio across important therapeutic areas, including cardiovascular, respiratory, oncology, neuroscience, infectious disease, immunology, and women's health.

Schering-Plough generates about 70 percent of its revenue outside of the United States, including more than US\$2 billion in annual revenue from emerging markets. As a result, the merger will dramatically accelerate Merck's own international growth efforts, including the company's goal of reaching top five market share in targeted emerging markets, company officials said. **M AFP**

UP-PGH gets ISO certification

The University of the Philippines–Philippine General Hospital (UP-PGH) was recently granted the ISO 9001:2008 certification by the International Organization for Standardization and Anglo Japanese American Registrars. This makes the UP-PGH the first Philippine public facility to earn the latest version of the “universal seal” for quality and standardized service.

“As the national university hospital, UP-PGH has always had the reputation of being one of the best public health-care providers in the country,” said Dr. Carmelo Alfiler, UP-PGH director. “But with the official ISO certification, this reputation is no longer just a lip service.”

The hospital’s efforts to cement its commitment to international standards started in Alfiler’s term in 2004. During its centennial celebration in 2007, the official quality committee for the ISO certification was created in partnership with Rosehall Management Consultants and the institutional research, planning, and development staff.

Alfiler said that having UP-PGH ISO certified was one of his priorities for the hospital to be a worthy member of the international league of national university hospitals, and have a written proof of



being able to meet quality standards for health care.

The project got a boost when President Gloria Arroyo issued in February 2007 Executive Order 605 or “Institutionalizing the Structure, Mechanisms and Standards to Implement the Government Quality Management Program,” which mandated all government agencies to get ISO 9001:2000 certification.

To gain international certification, UP-PGH undertook an organization-wide systems standardization to enhance customer satisfaction; improve internal performance; establish information needs; reduce errors, rework, and unnecessary expense across the hospital; and improve organizational discipline through quality audits.

Aside from service, the quality policies of UP-PGH include commitment to training, research, compassionate human resources, and safe working environment.

Alfiler said UP-PGH will continue to strive for excellence and leadership to provide equal and quality health care to Filipinos. “As we pledged during the centennial celebrations of

PGH in 2007 and of the University of the Philippines in 2008, we hope to make a big difference for PGH and benchmark it with the best national university hospitals in Asia and the world. Our mission is to provide quality health care for all,” he said. **M** **Arian Rabino**

Ambica offers warfarin genetic tests

Ambica Biotechnologies Philippines recently added pharmacogenetic testing for accurate warfarin dosing among the genetic tests it is offering to Filipino patients. Warfarin is an anticoagulant that prevents the production of the clotting factors, II, VII, IX, and X by inhibiting the action of vitamin K. Without these clotting factors fibrin cannot be converted into fibrinogen and blood clots are less likely to occur.

Warfarin is used for prophylaxis or treatment of venous thrombosis, pulmonary embolism, and thromboembolic complications associated with atrial fibrillation or heart-valve replacement. It is also used to lower the risks of death, recurrent myocardial infarction, and stroke.

In 2007, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required warfarin manufacturers to include on the label an advice to physicians to consider using “genetic tests to improve their initial estimate” of warfarin dose.

The two most important genes affecting the pharmacokinetic and pharmacodynamic parameters of warfarin are cytochrome p450 2C9 (CYP2C9) and vitamin K epoxide reductase subunit C1 (VKORC1).

The cytochrome p450 2C9 test estimate a patient’s rate of warfarin metabolism based on the CYP2C9 liver enzyme primarily responsible



for metabolizing the most active component of warfarin. Some patients have a genetic variation in the CYP2C9 enzyme so that they metabolize warfarin more slowly than usual, and would require a lower dose of warfarin than those who metabolize warfarin faster.

The VKORC1 test estimates a patient’s sensitivity to warfarin. VKORC1 is the gene that codes for the enzyme that is the site of action where warfarin exerts its effect.

Ambica Biotechnologies, in cooperation with Reliance Life Sciences, performs Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) using specific primers to determine single nucleotide polymorphisms in CYP2C9 and VKORC1 genes, followed by direct nucleotide sequencing of the PCR products. Nucleotide sequencing is the gold standard for detection of single nucleotide polymorphisms.

The test is more than 98-percent sensitive and specific for determining DNA polymorphism.

The optimal warfarin daily dose is determined by the doctor using the algorithm proposed by Sconce and colleagues in 2005, incorporating CYP2C9 and VKORC1 allelotype, age, and height of the patient.

Samples are sent in a cold-chain environment to India within 30 to 36 hours. Test results are available within five days and reports are in secure pdf format that can be made available online or delivered to the requesting physician.

The alliance between Ambica Biotechnologies, whose main laboratory in Mumbai, India was recently accredited by the College of American Pathologists, and Reliance Life Sciences brings the latest products of molecular, genetic research, and clinical applications to the Philippines.

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