

## Religious Proscriptions and Dietary Supplements

BY NADIA A. KARIM

As the global economy continues to climb out of the trough of the Great Recession, consumers continue to seek alternative and preventative solutions to medical ailments. While conventional over-the-counter and prescription medication focuses on addressing medical symptoms, the natural products industry has promoted the pursuit of a healthier lifestyle designed to eschew medical issues before they occur.

Interestingly, increased religiosity and adherence to formal religious traditions are growing concurrently with dietary supplement use. According to the Pew Forum of Religion and Public Life, religiosity and religious adherence has increased over the past couple of

years, which is concurrent with the growth in the dietary supplement industry, as reported by the *Nutrition Business Journal*.

Natural remedies and homeopathy have long been an integral part of myriad religious traditions. Within the Asian context, the Indian ayurvedic tradition has spawned several clinically proven natural alternatives. Similarly, ancient Chinese herbal medicine continues to serve as an anecdotal basis for new dietary supplement research. However, in addition to the rich tradition of promoting the use and development of dietary supplements, religious traditions also prohibit the consumption of certain foods and ingredients.

While academics and theologians debate the logic, reasoning and purpose of dietary proscriptions, for the average religious person, dietary restrictions are simply accepted at face value. As such, both Jews and Muslims refrain from consuming pork or porcine derivatives. Similarly, Hindus refrain from consuming products that contain animal ingredients. More restrictive still are Jains, who refrain from consuming any foods or food products that exhibit signs of life (e.g., potatoes, which continue to show growth after harvest).

From a dietary supplement perspective, these restrictions translate to the method of processing and the ingredients used in such processing activities. The Jewish kosher tradition not only prohibits the use of certain ingredients (e.g., bovine ingredients that were not slaughtered under the rules of kashrut), it also proscribes the consumption of certain parts of a permissible animal and requires the absence of heat in certain processing environments. Similarly, the Islamic zabihah-halal rules require a certain method of slaughter of permissible animals and the absence of alcohol in production processes.

It is important to note that many reli-

gious scholars interpret these rules as non-applicable to products that are consumed for medicinal purposes. Yet, many religious adherents simply steer clear from any prohibited ingredient and prefer to consume products that are certified to meet a certain religious purity. As such, many mainstream food products have adopted religious certifications that cater to the vegetarian, vegan, Jewish or Muslim communities.

Certifying agencies such as Star-K, OU, Islamic Food and Nutrition Council of America (IFANCA) and the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) have established kosher or halal certification programs for food, dietary supplement and pharmaceutical companies. Such certification programs ensure that the manufacturing process, and active and inactive ingredients are free from any proscribed ingredient or process. Religious certification bodies typically use a model similar to the concepts of hazard analysis and critical points (HACCP). However, unlike HACCP, the religious certification process attempt to identify kosher or "halal control points."<sup>1</sup>

Within the world of dietary supplements, many active ingredients are difficult to find in their kosher or halal certified forms. For example, chondroitin

salts are generally derived from porcine ingredients, and are therefore impermissible for Jews and Muslims. Similarly, chitosan is derived from shellfish and therefore impermissible for Jews. However, other components such as the two-piece empty hard shell capsule are readily available in myriad compositions. Instead of porcine-based gelatin capsules, bovine- or vegetable-based capsules are used without altering the product's utility or bioavailability. Indeed, this trend of eschewing the use of porcine-based gelatin in capsules is also gaining traction in soft gel manufacturing, where cellulose polymers are used to encapsulate the active liquid or emulsion ingredient.

Glycerin is another ingredient that many Jews and Muslims find objectionable, because it may be derived from animal sources. However, if the glycerin is certified to be a derivative of some vegetable oil, it satisfies the kosher and halal requirements. Likewise, animal enzymes (i.e., pepsin) in dietary supplements are especially problematic because the animals must be slaughtered according to kashrut or zabihah-halal standards.

As the dietary supplement industry continues to grow, marketers will inex-

orably cater to smaller niches and markets to differentiate their products. Similarly, as American marketers continue to expand throughout Asia and the Middle East, a nuanced understanding of religious dietary restrictions will prove to be helpful. As such, working with ingredient suppliers and contract manufacturers that are aware of the myriad religious proscriptions is essential so that alternative ingredients and formulations are used in dietary supplements. By doing so, the industry will be poised for future growth and healthy living. **NIE**

## Reference:

1 Mian N. Riaz and Muhammad M. Chaudry. *Halal Food Production*. New York: CRC Press, 2004.



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