



Consumer Preferences in Oral Dosage Forms of Over-the-Counter Drugs and Nutritional Supplements

Abstract

Over the past two decades, studies have shown that soft capsules, plant-based or gelatin, are consumers' preferred oral dosage form. The key reasons given for their preference are ease of use and swallowing, perceived speed of delivery, lack of unpleasant odor or taste, and a modern appearance.

A recent European study conducted by Expressions Planning Limited on behalf of Catalent Pharma Solutions, confirms the preference for the soft capsule dosage form, and in particular, for soft plant-based capsules. The in-person survey of 607 consumers in the UK, France and Italy was conducted to better understand consumer preferences for soft capsule forms in over-the-counter (OTC) medicines and vitamin/mineral supplements (VMS). The study objectives were to define and prioritize consumer dosage issues for OTC and VMS products; assess/quantify the relative performance of various dosage formats in meeting these issues; determine the preferred dosage format for both markets; and evaluate the consumer propensity to pay a premium for their preferred form. The study also aimed to provide guidance on product development to companies in these markets.

In June 2009, quantitative research was conducted through face-to-face, in-home interviews with a representative sample of 200 adults each from France and Italy, and 207 from the UK. The study tested tablets, coated tablets, fast-melt tablets, effervescent tablets, soft-shell capsules, hard-shell capsules, and sachets/powders.

For both the OTC and VMS markets, the three key study conclusions were:

- Softgel capsules are the preferred oral dosage form in both the OTC and VMS markets in all three countries
- Consumers prefer easy-to-swallow, oval-shaped capsules, and preferred Vegicaps® Soft plant-based capsule shells over gelatin shells
- Many consumers may be willing to pay a price premium for the soft capsule dosage form

Executive Summary

Study Results

Dosage Form Preference

According to the survey, in both OTC and VMS markets, consumers clearly prefer soft capsules to all other oral dosage form options, significantly surpassing coated and uncoated tablets. Only in the OTC market in France did another format perform as well as soft capsules. In the VMS market, softgel capsules are the most preferred dosage format in all countries, by nearly a third of consumers in France and Italy and by more than half in the UK.

The soft capsule significantly outperformed all other dosage formats as consumers believe it is convenient and comfortable to take, appears easy to digest, and looks appealing, pure, and natural. Most consumers would even choose this dosage form for their children, although in the OTC market, they prefer soft capsule forms and effervescent tablets in the same range for their children, with both forms being significantly preferred to any other dosage format.

Another strong consumer preference, expressed by more than three-quarters of respondents, is for a plant-based (animal-free) capsule over a gelatin form. Plant-based soft capsules, such as Vegicaps® Soft, were perceived to project a more natural brand image, and can be used by vegetarians and people with certain religious or cultural restrictions.

In terms of shape, consumers in both the OTC and VMS markets are far more likely to choose oval and round soft capsule forms over oblong, with the oval shape consistently preferred to the round shape, primarily because it looks purer and more natural than other dosage forms.

Most Important Perceived Product Attributes

When choosing an OTC product, consumers consider safety, efficacy and fast-acting the most important factors influencing their choice, followed by the same three motivators leading the choice of VMS products: easily digested, easy to swallow and convenient to take. However, in the VMS market, products containing natural ingredients are considerably more important in consumers' choice. Other purchase motivators in both markets were: products consumers used before, no taste or aftertaste, and product popularity.



What qualities of soft capsule forms motivate consumers the most? Their ease of swallowing is the most frequently stated reason for choosing this form in both the OTC market (69% of consumers) and VMS markets (70%). In fact, more than three-quarters of consumers prefer to take two smaller capsules rather than one large capsule, primarily for ease of swallowing. In both markets, uncoated tablets are considered uncomfortable by more than two-thirds of consumers, who are concerned that tablets can get stuck in their throat, and look uncomfortable to swallow.

Pricing

In both OTC and VMS markets, more than a quarter of consumers who prefer soft capsules are willing to pay a price premium for them.

Discussion

When considering dosage forms and shapes in your development and marketing of VMS and OTC products, it is important to keep in mind the clear consumer preferences revealed in past and recent studies and concerns about swallowing difficulty. Since the soft capsule form is the preferred dosage format, primarily for its swallowing ease, choosing this form demonstrates considerable advantages in ensuring consumer satisfaction, repeat purchases and product longevity. Choosing a consumer-preferred form and shape for your products can provide considerable advantages in product marketing, lifecycle management, building brand identity, and your bottom line.

Catalent: Leader in Soft Capsules

Catalent Pharma Solutions, a leading global provider of advanced oral dosage forms, is the originator and leading manufacturer of softgels. With more than 75 years of working with major consumer healthcare companies across the globe, Catalent provides the expertise, advanced technologies, and market understanding needed for successful development of OTC medicines, nutritional supplements, and prescription pharmaceutical products.



Catalent's oral dosage technologies help companies build brand identity, differentiate their product to stand apart from the competition, extend product lifecycle, and improve product marketability.

Remaining a pioneer in the softgel industry, Catalent continues to offer solutions that meet the demands of today's health-conscious consumers. We understand the competitiveness in the OTC and VMS markets today, and are committed to helping your product reach the market faster and easier through more efficient lifecycle management.

Our soft capsule technologies include:

- Softgel capsules
- Vegicaps® Soft capsules, 100% animal-free, patented encapsulation system, easy to swallow and helps project a more natural brand image
- Liqui-Gels® liquid softgel technology
- Enhanced solubility system, enhances solubility of actives to improve bioavailability, also used for actives with low aqueous solubility at high concentrations
- Chewable softgels that mask unpleasant flavors, ideal for children, geriatrics and others who have difficulty swallowing
- Enteric-coated capsules that prevent disintegration in the stomach
- Rapid dispersion system to enhance absorption of actives
- Deodorisation system
- Biosol and neutral-taste systems for enhanced dispersion and reduced reflux

Catalent is well positioned to serve you wherever you do business. Contact us today.

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