

Interest brews in kinder, gentler coffee

Folgers poised for national launch of Simply Smooth

CINCINNATI — Representing the first such move by a major coffee company, Procter & Gamble Co., Cincinnati, announced plans to introduce nationally Folgers Simply Smooth, a product targeted toward consumers who experience stomach irritation from drinking coffee.

Available beginning next month in regular and decaffeinated varieties, Simply Smooth is described by the company as “carefully roasted using a gentle process that reduces the presence of irritants that can affect a sensitive stomach.”

The introduction follows the launch several years earlier of Puroast, a low-acid coffee brand that has established a niche, and the growth of demand in Europe for “stomach friendly” coffee.

Folgers estimated 38 million U.S. adults are unable to drink coffee or to consume as much of it as they’d like because of stomach irritation.

“Over the last few years there was a lot of learning in the coffee category in terms of what consumers need or want,” said Lars Atorf, external relation manager with P.&G. “We created a consumer relations group for Folgers, and this issue of stomach irritation came up. People are more and more conscious of what they eat and what they drink, of what their diet should look like.”

Mr. Atorf said P.&G. discovered the smaller brand in Germany that was being marketed as a “stomach friendly coffee.”

“We learned it is doing well in the market, which supported our thinking and triggered our product development,” he said.

The German coffee, sold under the Hevla brand, is produced using a “high-pressure steaming process to remove most of the natural irritants that form during coffee roasting,” the company said. Its U.S. offices are in Endicott, N.Y.

As in many other food categories, coffee drinkers do not appear willing to sacrifice taste for enhanced health-related qualities, Mr. Atorf said.

“The product does very well in taste tests,” Mr. Atorf said. “The stomach discomfort reduction is an add on.”

Asked to elaborate on the stom-

ach discomfort, Mr. Atorf said Simply Smooth is not targeted toward alleviating symptoms from a specific medical condition.

“There are a variety of symptoms that people experience,” he said. “It has to do with increasing stomach acid while drinking coffee, but there are many factors that can lead to the symptoms.”

While Simply Smooth does not make specific health claims, acid reflux looms large among various stomach woes prevalent across the United States, said Norton J. Greenberger, a gastroenterologist at Brigham and Women’s Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Boston. Dr. Greenberger estimated 60 million Americans suffer from reflux symptoms, with 10 million experiencing symptoms daily.

“All of us reflux acid into our esophagus several times a day, but

blamed for mounting reflux problems, for reasons other than acid content.

“Fatty foods slow the digestion process down, permitting food to regurgitate into the esophagus—foods like fried chicken, french fries, pork chops or fatty roast beef,” Dr. Greenberger said.

Mr. Atorf said that more than the coffee’s acidic content creates stomach discomfort. Dr. Greenberger concurred.

“Caffeine helps the lower esophageal sphincter relax, causing reflux,” he said.

Coffee bean blending and special roasting techniques, rather than special technologies, are key to the special qualities of Simply Smooth, Mr. Atorf said.

“There are no chemical treatments or additives in this product,” he said. “We are not extracting anything or adding anything.”

Puroast Coffee Co., Woodland, Calif., which has been selling reduced-acid coffee since 1999, offered at least somewhat greater detail than P.&G., both about its process and the symptoms it addresses.

The company’s process reduces the content of quinic acid by 50%, versus most other coffee brands. Quinic acid, which gives tonic water its bitter taste, is thought to cause acid reflux, Puroast said.

“We believe this is the main reason for solving people’s acid problems relating to coffee drinking,” the company said.

The company’s consumer research found that 90% of customers who had suffered from stomach discomfort in the past related to coffee drinking found that Puroast partly or completely relieved their symptoms. The company said the product scored well on good taste (76%) and smoothness (71%). FBM

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— Lars Atorf, external relations manager of Procter & Gamble Co.



most people don’t have symptoms,” he said. “If you make a lot of acid, you’re likely to have symptoms.”

Other factors contribute to reflux as well, Dr. Greenberger said. Many individuals have a faulty valve at the base of the esophagus, which causes reflux.

“The increased problem of obesity in this country has made reflux more prevalent,” Dr. Greenberger said. “Obesity puts pressure on that part of the stomach.”

While the acidity of coffee (pH of 5 based on a scale with 0 as acid, 7 as neutral and 14 as base) has been implicated in reflux, the principal culprits targeted by doctors for patients with reflux are citrus (pH of 3, for orange juice), vinegar (3) and cola (2.75), Dr. Greenberger said.

Fatty foods also have been