

No more red face after drinking?



Anjali Raguraman

Back in university, Singaporeans Solomon Poon and Ryan Foo, both 25, attended several networking events in their final year – many of which involved drinking alcohol while socialising.

Mr Poon recalls: "Our faces would turn red after the first drink, which did not look professional."

While there are pills and drinks on the market that help mitigate the effects of hangovers, "none were geared towards reducing the Asian flush", he adds.

The Asian flush refers to the phenomenon when someone's face turns red after drinking alcohol – common among Asians of Chinese, Japanese and Korean descent.

So Mr Poon, an economics graduate, and Mr Foo, a law graduate, decided to make their own product that can treat the alcohol flush.

The duo – who graduated from the Singapore Management University (SMU) a year apart – came up

with DrinkAid, a supplement in a pill form that can be taken before or after drinking – or both, depending on how much is imbibed.

It claims to combat the negative side effects of alcohol consumption like the Asian flush and hangovers.

Launched in end-August, the pills are priced at \$19.90 for a box of 12 capsules. Three boxes cost \$49.90 and six boxes are \$89.90. They can be purchased at drinkaid.co.

The duo say the pills are manufactured by a contract manufacturer in a GMP (Good Manufacturing Practice) certified facility in China, and are compliant with Health Sciences Authority (HSA) supplement guidelines.

Health supplements are not subject to approvals and licensing by HSA for their importation, manufacture and sales.

Doctors who were approached declined to comment on this product. The pair said they have had about

2,000 orders to date.

The idea came about after they connected over their shared experience of turning red after drinking and a low tolerance for alcohol consumption.

Research and development took over a year.

"We shortlisted ingredients that would break down acetaldehyde – a byproduct of alcohol which causes the Asian flush and which is 10 times more toxic than alcohol," says Mr Poon, who is also a certified nutritionist and has had experience creating a fat-loss supplement.

"Studies have shown that around 50 per cent of Asians have a genetic deficiency of an enzyme called aldehyde dehydrogenase 2 (ALDH2) that impairs the breakdown of acetaldehyde," he explains.

"Since your body cannot produce enough of the enzyme, acetaldehyde builds up to toxic levels quickly – hence the flushing," he

adds.

Working from home, they sourced raw ingredients from suppliers used by major supplement manufacturers, originating in countries like the United States, Japan and China.

After experimenting on themselves for several months using different permutations and ratios of ingredients, they came up with a prototype for DrinkAid at the end of last year.

Instead of the usual ingredients like turmeric – which is found in many hangover cures from Japan and South Korea stocked here – they "looked in the places that no one looked", including studies written in Italian and Russian.

Their key ingredients include ginger extract, black pepper extract and Japanese raisin tree, which contains an active ingredient (dihydromyricetin) which they say has been found to alleviate headaches

and nausea, curb liver damage from alcohol, as well as increase the breakdown of acetaldehyde.

With the prototype, the project was further developed under SMU's Business Innovations Generator – an equity-free incubation programme managed by the university's Institute of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, for start-ups in their early stages to refine their product and business plans.

Along with providing a co-working space at innovation hub SMU Connexion, start-ups also receive support in the form of grant opportunities and access to mentors and advisers whom they can check in with on major milestones.

"The biggest benefit was the introduction to relevant contacts in the industry," Mr Poon notes.

While they were unable to get product expertise specific to supplements – since most of the experts were more well-versed in the phar-

maceutical industry – they did get advice on things like making sure their product is compliant with HSA guidelines.

Though the product launched only a little more than a month ago, they say they are now getting orders from all over the world.

Down the line, they hope to expand distribution to "countries with the Asian flush problem and a strong drinking culture", Mr Poon says.

Among their return clients is Mr Rudy Pierre Low, 39, chief executive officer of Luxe Events Private Limited, which specialises in boat parties.

He has made DrinkAid available at his networking events.

But, he says, "I caution my clients that this is not a miracle pill".

anjaliir@sph.com.sg



Mr Ryan Foo (far left) and Mr Solomon Poon developed a supplement, DrinkAid, which claims to combat alcohol consumption's negative side effects like intoxication, Asian flush and hangovers. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG