

DIET AND SUPPLEMENTATION · 14.10

Multivitamins, Mineral Blends and the "Brain Supplement" Marketing

The market for branded ADHD supplements has grown rapidly. The category sits in a regulatory grey area: food supplements are not required to demonstrate efficacy and the marketing language is carefully crafted to imply treatment without triggering medicines regulation. This summary covers the patterns to recognise and what to ask before buying.

FOR

Parents and adults considering ADHD focus or brain supplement products

AUDIENCE AGE

All ages

REVIEWED

18 May 2026

PART OF

The NeuroFX resource library

IN SUMMARY

Multivitamins, Mineral Blends and the "Brain Supplement" Marketing

How the market is structured

- **Medicines and food supplements are regulated differently.** Medicines require trial evidence and MHRA approval. Food supplements do not, and cannot legally make medicinal claims. Brain supplements sit in the food supplement category.
- **The language is carefully crafted.** Products cannot say 'treats ADHD'. They can say 'supports focus', 'promotes mental clarity', 'may help with attention'. The phrasing is designed to imply treatment without making the specific claim that would require trial evidence.
- **The price is often set on the implied treatment claim.** Bundled blends typically cost substantially more than the standalone ingredients with the real evidence (such as omega-3 or saffron) bought separately.

The recurring marketing patterns

- **'Doctor formulated' or 'neuroscientist developed'.** Sometimes accurate, sometimes window dressing. Not the same as published RCT evidence on the specific product.
- **Small underpowered single-ingredient studies overstated.** The product contains ten ingredients; the marketing references one trial on one of them, often with weak methodology and an effect that did not replicate.
- **Ingredient-stacking around one real-evidence component.** A small piece of real evidence on omega-3 or iron gets bundled with bacopa, ginkgo, L-theanine, lion's mane and others of unknown ADHD relevance. The combination has no specific trial evidence behind it.
- **'Natural alternative to stimulants' framing, personalised quizzes, influencer marketing.** Trades on parental anxiety about medication. Quizzes are marketing tools, not clinical assessment. Influencer testimonials are not evidence. Subscription models maximise revenue.

Five questions to ask before buying

- **Is there a published RCT on this specific product?** Not just the ingredient class. If yes, read it. If no, the marketing is using ingredient-class evidence to sell a different product.
- **What does the cost look like compared with the standalone active ingredient?** Often substantially higher. If omega-3 is the active component, a basic fish oil costs a fraction of the branded blend.
- **Ask the pharmacist or prescribing clinician.** Many UK community pharmacists will give honest advice on supplement value. The prescriber needs to know what you are taking regardless of clinical advice on whether to take it.

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

If you are considering a branded ADHD supplement, the pharmacist is the most accessible source of practical UK advice; the GP and any prescribing clinician should be told what is being taken regardless. Where a deficiency is the question, blood testing first is the right step. NeuroFX assessment includes a review of current supplements alongside the wider clinical picture.

SOURCES

Trebatická 2006; Sonuga-Barke 2013; MHRA borderline products; ASA; Faraone consensus 2021; NHS guidance

NEXT STEPS**Speak to NeuroFX**

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