

# Health of the Nation

How the UK sees its own health in 2025



# The health of our nation has never been under greater scrutiny.

Rising NHS waiting times, record levels of health concerns, and the increasing demands of an ageing population are all contributing to a perfect storm of pressure on public health services. As a result, the national conversation is shifting – from treatment alone to prevention as a core component of healthcare.

Central to this shift is a growing recognition that we must support healthier lifestyles through better diet, improved nutrition, and easier access to tools that help people take control of their wellbeing. That's where health food supplements come in.

Food supplements have long been a vital part of the public health puzzle supplying a source of nutrients as part of a healthy diet and wellness regime. Yet their full value remains untapped. Public understanding is inconsistent, and political attention has often been diverted elsewhere.

This year's Health of the Nation report, commissioned by the Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) and conducted by Censuswide, takes a comprehensive look at how UK adults view their health, their diets, and their use of food supplements. The findings reveal an appetite for healthier choices, but also a confidence gap and clear areas where targeted support, education and policy change could unlock better outcomes.

In short: the UK is not as healthy as it thinks it is. But the solutions – and the public appetite for them – are there.

**This report provides a blueprint for action**



Introduction by Director General  
**Martin Last**

## Top lines

The key findings of our report into the health of the nation in 2025 are:



### The nation's diet is need of support

While many people describe themselves as healthy, the data shows widespread nutritional variation. Most are not meeting recommended intake levels for essential nutrients – even though they believe they are.



### A generational divide

Age is a defining factor in how people approach supplementation. Older adults are more sceptical and less likely to use supplements, even though they are most vulnerable to deficiencies. Meanwhile, younger generations are more open – but are increasingly relying on unregulated online sources of advice.



### Doc knows best

Health professionals remain among the most trusted voices. Among supplement users, one of the most common triggers to start taking them is advice from a doctor, GP or other medical expert – especially for women aged 25–34.



### More information needed

Across all demographics, people are calling for clearer labelling, especially for probiotics. There is also widespread agreement that supplements are an important tool for weight management and restrictive diets.

# The Health Confidence Gap.

## Perception vs reality in the nation's diets

### Brits are more confident in their health than the data justifies.

The UK public remains optimistic about their personal health - but the numbers paint a different picture.

Around two-thirds (67%<sup>1</sup>) of respondents describe themselves as 'healthy'. However, just 22% are eating the Government's recommended daily intake of fruit and vegetables (5 portions) and 21% are eating the recommended daily intake of fibre (30g). The same small percentage (22%) consumes vitamin and mineral-rich foods daily.

This disconnect reveals a confidence gap: a tendency to overestimate dietary health or underestimate what good nutrition truly requires. It is an indication that many people may be missing out on key nutrients without even realising it.

The data also shows major generational divides. Just over four in five (81%<sup>2</sup>) of all respondents said their diets lacked at least one important nutrient. But while only 10% of 16-24-year-olds believed they aren't lacking any nutrients, 39% of over-65s said the same - suggesting either overconfidence or a lack of understanding of the increased nutritional needs that come with age.

Modern dietary choices can also play a role in nutrient gaps. As more people adopt vegetarian, vegan, or flexitarian diets, there is growing potential for unintentional shortfalls in essential nutrients such as vitamin B12, iron, calcium, iodine and omega-3 fatty acids - many of which are primarily found in animal-derived foods. While these diets can be healthy and sustainable, they often require careful planning or supplementation to ensure nutritional balance.

This knowledge gap presents an urgent opportunity for intervention - through clearer public guidance, stronger support from professionals, and greater access to food supplements to close nutritional gaps and support good.

### Key stats:

- Just over two-thirds (67%<sup>1</sup>) of people describe their health as 'healthy'.
- Only around 1 in 5 people are meeting the daily recommended intake of fruit and veg (22%) and fibre (21%) - and a similar percentage (22%) are eating vitamin- and mineral-rich foods daily.
- Over four in five (81%<sup>2</sup>) of people believe their diet lacks at least one key nutrient.
- Only 10% of 16-24 year olds believe they aren't lacking any nutrients, versus 39% of over 65s

<sup>1</sup> 'Very healthy' and 'Somewhat healthy' responses combined

<sup>2</sup> Inverse of those who selected "N/A - I don't think I'm lacking any nutrients"



# Supplements in focus.

## Greater education to revamp uptake

**Over a third of Brits (37%) report to be taking at least one type of food supplement everyday and there is clear recognition from the public that health food supplements support in maintaining a healthy lifestyle.**

Generally seen as a convenient way to ensure broad nutritional coverage, multivitamins and minerals are the most widely used supplement category, with one in three (33%) people reporting use - and nearly two-thirds (64%) of those using them daily.

While reasons for taking supplements vary, the top three motivators are:

- 1. General health and wellbeing (49%)**
- 2. Normal immune function (35%)**
- 3. Dietary gaps** (such as not getting sufficient amounts of a specific nutrient (19%) or covering occasional lapses (19%))

28% of users were prompted to take supplements following advice from an expert e.g., a doctor - highlighting the critical role that doctors and other medical experts play in boosting uptake and guiding better nutritional decisions.

Despite the broad uptake, a clear age divide was revealed by the data. Our survey found that nearly half (44%) of over-55s say they don't take any supplements at all - compared to much lower rates of non-usage among younger groups, such as just 13% of 25-34s. This is concerning, given that older adults are more prone to deficiencies in key nutrients like vitamin D and B12.

The number of UK adults using supplements has declined in recent years. In 2021, 71.2% of UK adults reported taking at least one food supplement, a surge most likely driven by increased interest in personal health and immunity during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

The 2021 spike highlights the strong association the public makes between supplements and maintaining a healthy lifestyle—particularly in times of heightened health risk. Given the slight 'drop-off' in supplement usage amongst UK adults since then, there is a case for greater education on the role of supplementation in protecting against dietary challenges in order to restore intake levels, particularly amongst the older generations who appear to be most at risk.

### Key stats:

- 44% of over-55s don't take any supplements. For 25-34s, that drops to just 13%
- One in three (33%) people take multivitamins and minerals; 64% of those take them daily.
- Most supplement users take them daily, though frequency varies by type.
- "General health and wellbeing" (49%) is the top reason for taking supplements, followed by "immune health" (35%) and "dietary gaps" (19%).
- 28% of supplement users were advised to take them by an expert recommendation e.g., a doctor.

<sup>3</sup> 2019 Health of the Nation Survey showed that 64% of adults regularly took supplements and the difference in 2021 was due to a peak during the covid pandemic.

# Scrolls over science.

## Gen Z turns to social media for supplement advice

### Younger generations are rewriting the rules of health information - and social media is now front and centre.

For 16–24-year-olds who take food supplements, one of the most influential source of advice (second only to 'friends and family') about supplements is social media platforms and online influencers. Over one in three (36%) of respondents in this age group said either of these channels shaped their choices.

This trend reflects the power and reach of digital content - but also carries real risk. Misinformation, unqualified advice, and viral trends can all lead to poor decision-making, or even harm.

Recognising these risks, some countries are taking steps to regulate health-related advice on social media. The Netherlands is one country which has introduced stricter regulations to ensure transparency and protect consumers.

Since July 2022, professional influencers with significant reach - those with over 500,000 followers and at least 24 video uploads annually - are subject to the Dutch Media Act. This legislation mandates clear disclosure of advertising, sponsorships, and product placements, especially concerning health-related content. Influencers must register with the Dutch Media Authority and adhere to guidelines that prohibit misleading promotions and require transparency about commercial relationships.

In 2024, the Dutch Media Authority imposed its first fine on an influencer for failing to clearly indicate that certain videos were advertisements, underscoring the enforcement of these regulations.

The solution isn't to dismiss these channels - it's to meet people where they are, and raise the standard of information they're receiving. Trusted voices must be amplified across both digital and physical spaces to ensure that decisions about supplementation are grounded in evidence, not algorithms.

#### Key stats:

- 36% of 16–24s say social media and/or online influencers are one of their main sources of information about supplements - ahead of expert advice or in-store guidance.



# Hidden cultures.

## Public appetite for transparency on labels

**The conversation around gut health has surged in recent years, and probiotics are now a prominent feature of many health-conscious diets. But for consumers, identifying these products isn't always straightforward.**

As awareness of gut health continues to grow, so too does the demand for clear labelling – particularly when it comes to probiotics.

More than six in ten respondents (64%<sup>4</sup>) said they would find it helpful if products containing probiotics were clearly marked on packaging. For an industry grounded in trust, this is a call to action.

Transparent labelling empowers consumers and demystifies a rapidly expanding sector. With probiotics potentially linked with digestive health and normal immune function, clarity is essential to help the consumer make a more informed choice when it comes to their health and wellbeing.

Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) reported that a healthcare professional had recommended they take a probiotic product as part of a treatment. This is particularly prevalent in 25–34-year-olds – of those who have been recommended taking a probiotic, 44% fall into this age bracket. However, due to current advertising restrictions, these people are currently unable to walk into a pharmacy and pick up a clearly labelled 'probiotic' product.

Under current UK guidance – carried over from EU rules – manufacturers are not permitted to use the term "probiotic" on pack labels or in marketing materials. This stands in contrast to several EU member states that have since adopted more flexible interpretations, recognising the unnecessary burden the restriction places on producers and the confusion it creates for consumers.

The HFMA is calling on Government to review this position. By issuing updated guidance – for example, allowing the use of the term "contains probiotic" as a content claim – the UK could provide much-needed clarity for shoppers and remove the inconsistency between professional medical advice (which often recommends probiotic consumption) and the commercial communication of these products.

Flexible guidance would not require changes to legislation, but it could play a crucial role in improving public understanding and supporting better health outcomes.

### Key stats:

- 64%<sup>4</sup> of respondents would find it helpful if products that contain probiotics specifically say they do on the label.
- 23% of respondents reported that a healthcare professional had recommended they take a probiotic product as part of a treatment.
- Of those who take supplements, 28% decided upon the supplement due to an expert recommendation eg. Doctor and 20% by Pharmacist recommendation.

<sup>4</sup> 'Very helpful' and 'Somewhat helpful' responses combined



# Dieting drives demand.

## Supplements seen as essential part of weight management

**The majority of respondents - 57%<sup>5</sup> - believe that supplements play an even more important role during diet or weight management regimes.**

This reinforces a perception of supplements as a form of nutritional insurance. When calorie intake is reduced or food groups are restricted, many individuals see supplements as a practical way to ensure they still meet their body's essential needs.

This demand isn't driven solely by weight management or aesthetic goals - it's also shaped by cultural practices. During periods of fasting such as Ramadan, when meal timing and frequency change significantly, supplementation can provide vital nutritional support. For many, it's a way of maintaining energy, focus, and immune health during periods when their typical diet is temporarily altered.

This highlights a broader truth: the reasons people turn to supplements are as diverse as their lifestyles. From intermittent fasting to religious observance, the need for targeted support during restricted eating windows is clear - and growing.

It also suggests that weight-conscious and lifestyle-driven consumers could be an important - and growing - audience for the health food sector. However, it's important that this demand is matched with clear guidance to ensure supplements are used safely and effectively as part of broader health goals.

### Key stat:

- 57%<sup>5</sup> of people believe supplements are more important during diet or weight management regimes.

<sup>5</sup> 'Much more important' and 'Somewhat more important' responses combined



# Conclusion.

**This year's *Health of the Nation* report reveals a public that is health-conscious but under-informed; willing to take action, but lacking the tools to do so effectively.**

The path forward is clear. We need a renewed focus on prevention, more robust public health education, and stronger collaboration between government, health professionals, and the health food industry.

**Supplements alone are not the whole the answer, – but they are a vital part of the dietary solution.**

With clearer labelling, better access to information, and the support of trusted voices, we can empower people across all age groups to take control of their health and close the nutritional gaps that are impacting on the health of the UK population.

**The nation's health is at a crossroads.**

It's time to bridge the gap between awareness and action – and utilise the potential of food supplements in supporting a healthier future.

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## **For more information:**

Visit our website: [hfma.co.uk](https://hfma.co.uk)

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The research was conducted by Censuswide, among a sample of 2000 UK Respondents (Nat Rep 16+). The data was collected between 07.04.2025 - 10.04.2025. Censuswide abides by and employs members of the Market Research Society and follows the MRS code of conduct and ESOMAR principles. Censuswide is also a member of the British Polling Council.