# Marks & Spencer's Brain Food range raises questions about cognitive health claims



In January 2025, Marks & Spencer launched its 'Brain Food' range, a line of fortified products aimed at enhancing cognitive health. The range features various food items such as nut butters, smoothies, kefir shots, and snack bars, all developed in consultation with the British Nutrition Foundation. The initiative responds to a growing consumer interest in products that claim to support brain functionality, particularly as health concerns regarding cognitive decline become more prevalent.

Despite the rising market for functional foods targeted at brain health, experts express caution over the scientific backing of such products. The concept of functional foods has been around for more than forty years, stemming from Japan, but the consensus largely highlights a need for more rigorous scientific studies to substantiate the claims made by these products. Renée Leber from the Institute of Food Technologists in Chicago conveyed to Just Food that there is insufficient evidence to assert that such products significantly exceed the benefits of a balanced diet.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) acknowledges the ambiguity surrounding functional foods by describing them as novel formulations containing substances or microorganisms that possibly enhance health or prevent illness, though many claims remain unverified. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has similarly noted that many cognitive health claims regarding supplements, such as those related to creatine, L-theanine, and ginkgo biloba, have not been substantiated, leading to cease-and-desist orders for certain marketing claims.

Experts assert that while Omega-3 fatty acids—found in oily fish and seaweed—are the most extensively studied components for brain health, claims surrounding other ingredients must be treated with caution. The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has also determined that many health claims related to cognitive enhancement lack the necessary supporting evidence, although there is a confirmed link between Omega-3s and normal brain function.

As functional foods become a multi-billion-pound industry, there are concerns surrounding the potential for consumers to be misled. Satu Jackson, CEO of the British Association for Nutrition and Lifestyle Medicine, highlighted the rapidly expanding market. However, she emphasised the complexity of these products, suggesting that there is often a lack of clarity regarding which components actually provide the reported benefits. "We would need to understand the composition of any functional foods and how they are manufactured," she noted.

Further complicating consumer choices are ‘medicinal’ mushrooms that have gained immense popularity, often marketed as solutions for a variety of health issues, from insomnia to immune support. This growing trend, referred to as the 'shroom boom', has seen global sales projected to exceed £16 billion by 2030. The nutritional science behind mushrooms is still being explored, with research suggesting potential benefits from certain compounds found within them, such as adaptogens. However, experts caution that scientific validation for many of these health claims is still lacking.

Professor Giuseppe Venturella of the University of Palermo highlighted the beneficial enzymes in mushrooms that enable their survival without sunlight, suggesting these might confer health advantages. Despite promising initial studies, there is insufficient robust scientific evidence to confirm the efficacy of many mushroom-based products that circulate in the health market.

As the demand for products claiming to enhance cognitive function and overall wellness continues to rise, consumers are encouraged to remain informed and critical of the health claims that accompany these newer offerings.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/range-previews/explore-mushrooms-brain-and-gut-food-in-marks-and-spencers-health-range-overhaul/699456.article> - This article supports the launch of Marks & Spencer's 'Brain Food' range and the inclusion of mushrooms in their health offerings, highlighting the trend towards functional foods for cognitive health.
* <https://www.shelflife.ie/ms-food-launches-brain-food-and-yay-mushrooms/> - This article corroborates the introduction of M&S's Brain Food and Yay Mushrooms ranges, emphasizing their focus on health and wellness.
* <https://naturalnewsdesk.co.uk/2025/01/04/ms-launches-ramps-up-functional-food-offer-with-brain-health-launch/> - This piece provides details on M&S's push into functional foods with the Brain Food range, developed in partnership with the British Nutrition Foundation, and highlights the marketing efforts behind the launch.
* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK209312/> - This resource from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) provides background information on functional foods and their potential health benefits, aligning with the NIH's stance on these products.
* <https://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/topics/topic/health-claims> - The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) website explains the process of evaluating health claims for foods, including those related to cognitive function, which supports the discussion on the lack of evidence for many brain health claims.
* <https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/health-claims-on-food-and-dietary-supplements> - This FDA webpage discusses the regulation of health claims on food and supplements, including those related to cognitive health, which aligns with the FDA's stance on unsubstantiated claims.