



# Ingredient Hot List

## BRAIN BOOSTERS & NOOTROPICS

You could say that food for thought is growing. That is, ingredients and products that will contribute to brain health are. Increasingly, consumers' holistic approach to health and wellness encompasses brain health as well as other parts of the body. Brain health – which includes the ability to learn, focus and remember -- is a priority for every generation, including children, by way of their mindful parents. As consumers get smart about the importance of brain health and mental clarity, they're looking for more brain-boosting ingredients, including nootropics (aka cognitive enhancers). Based on the Greek terms for "mind" and "turning", nootropics span functional foods and supplements that turn up brain functions like cognition, intelligence and memory.

# ABOUT OUR CLEAN CONSUMER INTERACTION

A nationwide survey was conducted with 126 Clean Label Enthusiast® consumers, where they were asked about their awareness and usage of trending ingredients. From there, 10 consumers were selected to participate in an online consumer focus group where they gave more detailed feedback on the ingredients. In this report we'll zero in on a few ingredients related to brain health.



“Brain health support in sports and energy drinks garners interest from many category users. As energy drinks have over the years established connotations with supporting alertness, making the move to a claim to support brain function is not that much of a leap. Various ingredients boast EFSA-approved claims as contributing to the maintenance of brain or cognitive function. Brands can also tap into the buzz around ‘Nootropics.’”

-Mintel



# GINSENG AND ASHWAGANDHA

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Ginseng, from the *Panax* genus of the ginseng plant, has long been used and revered for its healing properties, from ancient Asia to Native American medicine practices to

today's health-minded consumers all over the world. The substance has been linked with improved thinking, concentration and memory as well as an easing of depression and anxiety. In consumable form, it is found in teas and extracts and is a featured ingredient in a variety of Asian recipes.

Indian ginseng, or Ashwagandha is trending for its association with stress reduction and mood improvement. We've talked about ashwagandha in another [ingredient hot list](#). It's an ingredient that comes with inherent bitterness – but one that Bon Appetit calls “the most prolific adaptogen.”

## SHOPPER SENTIMENT

According to the proprietary FONA/Insights Now survey of Clean Enthusiasts, ginseng has a high awareness level, at 90%. Nearly two thirds of respondents – 60% -- report that they have tried ginseng or use it regularly. For Indian ginseng/ashwagandha, awareness at 31%, with 19% reporting that they've used it. While 47% say they have never consumed Indian ginseng, they told us that they would be interested in trying it.

## SOCIAL STATUS

**Ginseng** has seen 39% growth in social posts since last year. Ginseng has 83% positive sentiment with 3.1 mentions per minute, and more than 2 million posts in the last year.

**Ashwagandha/Indian ginseng** has 91% positive sentiment and has seen 32% growth in the number of posts since one year ago. We're spotting 48 mentions per hour, and 425,000 posts total.

# GINSENG & ASHWAGANDHA, continued



“Addressing the need for calming down, relief, and emotional support will allow food and drink brands to resonate, particularly among Millennials who, while maintaining an above-average awareness of healthy living, look beyond the traditional nutrition-based attributes of healthy eating.”

-The Millennial Impact, Mintel



## PRODUCTS OF NOTE



**THE REPUBLIC OF TEA** offers a Honey Ginseng Green Tea variety, sold in a 2.65-oz. canister. Ingredients include Panax ginseng along with China green tea, linden flowers, pollen, eleuthero and natural honey flavor.

Image credit: Republicoftea.com



**REBBL ASHWAGANDHA SPICY CHAI** is a 12-oz. drink that contains Indian ginseng extract, as well as assam tea, spices and coconut milk. It's labeled as ethically sourced and organic, too.

Consumer Sentiment: 8% of consumers polled responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.

# L-THEANINE



This amino acid is considered a nootropic and naturally occurs in some tea leaves, L-theanine is said to offer a range of brain-boosting capabilities, such as lower anxiety, better sleep

quality, relaxation and attention. Often, it's combined with caffeine to optimize its benefits. L-theanine is commonly found in green tea, usually 20 to 22 mg per cup. It is present in some black and oolong teas as well, and is available as a supplement in the marketplace.

## SHOPPER SENTIMENT

According to the recent survey of clean label enthusiasts conducted by FONA & Insights Now, most clean-seeking consumers have heard of L-theanine, but admit they don't know much about it. About 28% say they are aware of L-Theanine, 16% have tried it or use it regularly. About 40% have never tried the ingredient, but are open to trying it out.

## SOCIAL STATUS

Highlighting its status as a hot ingredient, L-Theanine is trending accordingly on social media, with a 93% positivity association, 16 mentions per hour and a 40% increase in posts from just one year ago. In regards to consumer perception, products featuring L-Theanine enjoy some positive sentiment. According to Purchase Intelligence, 78% of consumers polled view such products as convenient; 44% unique; 36% natural; 38% healthy.



**“I tried L-theanine recently, as a relaxation and sleep aid. I purchased the powder form online. It worked quite well, and I was able to rest more completely, and fall asleep faster.”**

-Clean Enthusiast Consumer



# L-THEANINE, continued

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## L-THEANINE/GREEN AND BLACK TEA PRODUCT RELEASES

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Tea, particularly green tea, is the most common source for L-theanine, beyond supplement form.



**YOGI TEA'S VANILLA SPICE PERFECT ENERGY TEA** is billed as a drink that energizes and supports focus with a combination of green tea and assam black tea, along with the amino acid L-Theanine. USA



**MIND WATER PEACH & PASSIONFRUIT SPARKLING NOOTROPIC DRINK** is said to be made with natural nootropics including ginkgo biloba, turmeric, green coffee beans, L-theanine, and green tea.

Consumer Sentiment: 25% of shoppers polled said they likely or definitely would buy this product.



**SWEET ZZZZ DARK CHOCOLATE FLAVOR SLEEP SUPPLEMENT BITES** are said to be "formulated with melatonin to support healthy sleep cycles and L-theanine to help calm the mind and quiet the thoughts." Includes 60 bites and ingredients include l-theanine, natural flavor and melatonin, among others.



# OMEGA-3S

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Omega-3 fatty acids are not new in terms of a food substance with a health halo, but in addition to longtime links in lowering triglyceride levels and easing joint pain, this type of fat is said to improve brain health. Some studies have tied foods with high levels of omega-3s to lower level of depression in humans and enhanced brain function and cognitive abilities.

Omega-3s, including DHA (proven essential in healthy neuronal membranes) are found in certain fatty fish like salmon. Plant sources with the ALA form of Omega-3s include nuts and seeds, including flax seeds, hemp seeds and chia seed, along with some leafy greens, broccoli and brussels sprouts.

## SHOPPER SENTIMENT

According to the recent survey of clean label enthusiasts conducted by FONA & Insights Now, Omega-3s don't have roadblock of recognition. A solid 94% of clean label consumers say they are aware of Omega-3 fatty acids — in fact the highest recognition of any ingredient included. More than one third (36%) have tried it before, and 38% have tried and use regularly.

## SOCIAL STATUS

Social mentions of Omega-3s have grown 29% since one year ago and the ingredients have 81% positivity. There have been 5 million posts since last year, and we're spotting 9.9 mentions per minute.

# OMEGA-3S, continued

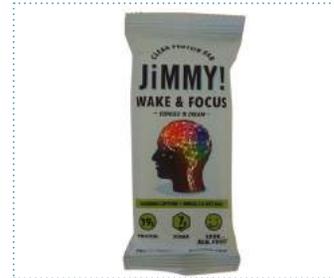
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“Most of the time I am eating [omega-3s] naturally occurring. When I use a supplement it is because I do not think I am eating enough omega-3s and I would like the benefits of them.”

-Clean consumer sampled

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## PRODUCTS OF NOTE



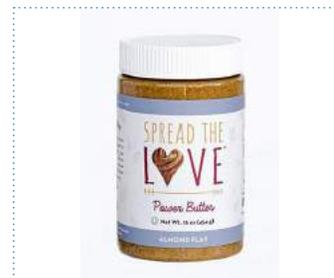
**JIMMY! WAKE & FOCUS COOKIES 'N CREAM CLEAN PROTEIN BAR** has 19 grams of protein and 7 grams of sugar. Ingredients include guarana, omega-3 oil and MCT oil.

Consumer Sentiment: 35% of consumers responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.



**DNX FOODS GRASS-FED BEEF AND UNCURED BACON JALAPENO BAR**, in a 1.25-ounce serving, has a little something for everyone: the keto-friendly snack is made with animal proteins free from antibiotics and hormones and is high in omega-3s. USA

Consumer Sentiment: 22% of consumers polled responded that they likely or definitely would buy this product.



**SPREAD THE LOVE ALMOND FLAX BUTTER** is rich in Omega-3 fatty acids as well as fiber and vitamin B. The non-GMO, gluten-free, vegan and 100% clean label butter, available in a 15-ounce jar, is a superfood-rich product that can be part of the brain-boosting movement. USA

Image Credit: [spreadthelovefoods.com](http://spreadthelovefoods.com)

# REISHI & OTHER MEDICINAL MUSHROOMS

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Magical mushrooms may sound like something out of a fairy tale or the wild 1969 Woodstock music festival, but some shoppers attest to real brain-enhancing effects to medicinal mushrooms. In particular, reishi mushrooms, also known as lingzi, are a hot ingredient for both mind and body health, for their nootropic properties as well as their use as an antioxidant and adaptogen. Described by some as a “brain tonic” – reishi is experiencing an old-is-new-again twist, since they have been used for thousands of years in traditional Chinese medicine.

Different types of reishi mushrooms are grown around the world. In addition to natural whole and dried mushrooms, Reishi powder is used as an ingredient in teas, coffees and other beverages. In addition to reishi, other mushroom varieties and mushroom powders are in the spotlight – namely, Lion’s Mane, Chaga, Turkey Tail and Cordyceps.



# REISHI & OTHER MEDICINAL MUSHROOMS, continued



## SHOPPER SENTIMENT

Although the earthy mushroom is a staple in many people's diets, medicinal mushrooms are less common, with 30% of clean-seeking shoppers in our survey indicating an awareness. That said, while 39% say they haven't tried reishi or other medicinal mushroom products, they would be interested in doing so. About 17% say that they have tried medicinal mushrooms or use them regularly.

## SOCIAL STATUS – REISHI

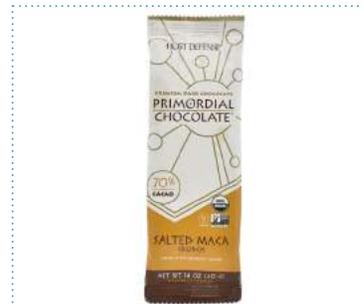
In terms of social posts, reishi enjoys 91% positive sentiment. Mentions have grown 25% in the past year and we're spotting 46 mentions per hour. There have been about 402,000 posts mentioning reishi in the last year. A large majority (70%) of posts are from women.

## REISHI MUSHROOM PRODUCTS OF NOTE



**CACAO CRUNCH ACTIVATED SUPERFOOD CEREAL** is said to include "the superfood goodness of raw cacao and revitalizing herbs like maca root, reishi, cordyceps and astragalus added with a blend of prebiotics to support body's overall wellness.

Consumer Sentiment: 15% of consumers polled said they likely or definitely would buy this product



**PRIMORDIAL CHOCOLATE SALTED MACA CRUNCH PREMIUM DARK CHOCOLATE** is said to be a blend of 70% cacao, coconut sugar and the mycelium of superfood, organic regal mushrooms, namely lion's mane, reishi, chaga and cordyceps.



**ANABOLIX STRAWBERRY SMOOTHIE DIETARY SUPPLEMENT** contains reishi as well as Peak O2 and EAA and BCAA amino matrix. This product can be consumed before, during and after exercise to support recovery and hydration.

Consumer Sentiment: 6% of consumers asked said they likely or definitely would buy this product.

# DARK CHOCOLATE

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In recent years, dark chocolate has been praised for its antioxidant properties and there are some credible claims of brain-boosting benefits to this favorite. Flavanols, a form of polyphenol in the cocoa bean, have been shown in some studies to improve cognitive function and memory; cocoa is said to improve blood flow to the brain and the consumption of flavanols may increase the gamma frequency in the cerebral cortex that of the brain that controls memory and sensory processing.

Generally, the darker the chocolate, the greater the levels of flavanols, which is why 70 percent cacao is a hot ingredient. (It's not just wishful thinking on the part of chocolate lovers.)

Like dark chocolate, there are other ingredients that are part of everyday diets that also have brain-boosting effects. Some fall under the ever-broadening superfoods umbrella. Examples include dark leafy greens like spinach and kale (rich in lutein), beets (with natural nitrates that boost blood flow to the brain) and broccoli (high in vitamin K and glucosinolates that help enhance cognitive function).

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**“These studies show us that the higher the concentration of cacao, the more positive the impact on cognition, memory, mood, immunity and other beneficial effects.”**

-Researcher Lee Berk, as quoted by Forbes

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# DARK CHOCOLATE, continued



## PRODUCT GROWTH

Products featuring dark chocolate have grown in the last two years. As of December 2019, there was more than 8% growth in product releases featuring the brain-boosting ingredient. According to Mintel, dark chocolate is less likely to be purchased as a gift than milk-chocolate products.



“While purchasers are creatures of habit when choosing chocolate, they are also open to new flavors and varieties and willing to pay more for premium quality. There are also opportunities for chocolate products promising functional health benefits.”

-Mintel



## DARK CHOCOLATE PRODUCTS OF NOTE



**COCOAVIA FLAVANOL CREAMER** is a functional coffee creamer used to promote healthy blood flow to deliver nutrients and oxygen to the brain.



**FOCUS FUNCTIONAL CHOCOLATE** is described as a formulated supplementary sports food. This focused energy dark chocolate is made with 80% cocoa, and contains lion's mane mushroom, green tea, ginkgo biloba and natural caffeine.

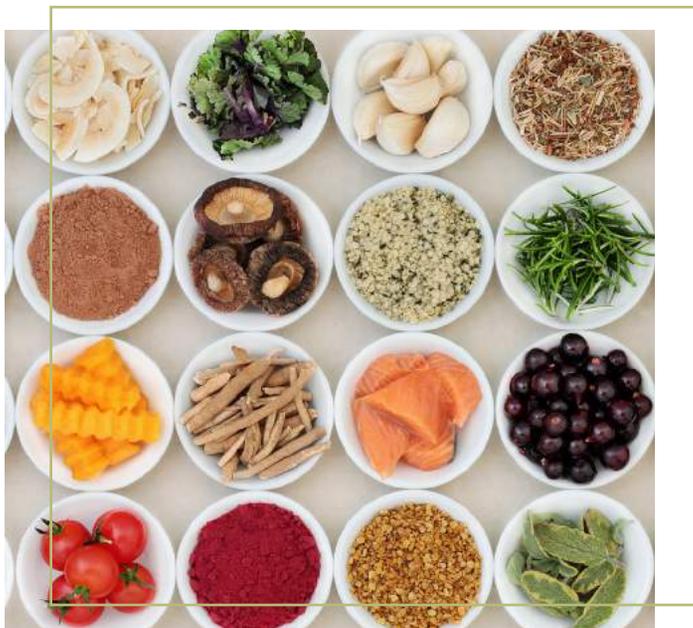
Consumer Sentiment: **21%** of shoppers asked said they likely or definitely would buy this product

# THE TAKEAWAYS

*Awareness of the mind-body connection is getting stronger, as consumers of all ages seek out ingredients that boost brain health, for reasons ranging from better focus to sharper memory. Product developers like yourself may choose to seek out brain-boosting ingredients include nootropics, which are functional foods and supplements said to increase cognitive function, clarity and other aspects of brain health. If brain boosting products are in your future, consider this: not all ingredients with a “healthy halo” need to be undiscovered newbies to the ingredient list – familiar favorites like dark chocolate and ginseng are also options. Just know that taste is still the #1 consideration for consumers, so make sure you have the right taste solutions partner to help you deliver it all – taste and nutrition.*

## SOURCES

- FONA & Insights Now: “Hot Ingredients” Qualitative Survey and of Clean Label Enthusiast, October 2019
- Mintel
- Infegy
- Purchase Intelligence
- Mintel GNPD
- Medium: How L-Theanine will change your morning coffee for ever
- Refinery29: Reishi Mushrooms Health Benefits
- Forbes: Dark Chocolate May Boost Brain Function, Mood, Immunity
- BBC “GoodFood”, “10 Foods to Boost Your Brainpower”, 2017
- Food Dive brief, “Dark Chocolate Could Boost Cognitive Function and Creativity, Study Suggests”, May 2018
- Cleveland Clinic, “Healthy Brains: Brain Facts”, <https://healthybrains.org/brain-facts/>



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