

Importing food supplements and health foods

Guidance on labelling, contaminants and what to look out for when importing products which come from animals.

Labelling

The Department of Health provides [information on nutritional labelling policy](#) for food supplements and health claims on their website.

If the supplement claims that it has the property of preventing, treating or curing a human disease or any reference to such a property, it may be classified as a medicine and the MHRA should be contacted for advice (contact details as above).

Novel foods

Food supplements, like other foods, are not required to demonstrate their effectiveness before marketing, nor are they subject to prior approval unless they are genetically modified or are 'novel'.

Novel foods which do not have a history of consumption in GB before May 1997, and are subject to the terms and conditions of the assimilated [Novel Foods Regulation 2015/2283](#).

For further information contact the Novel Foods Division team by email.

Chemical safety

Contaminants

The [Contaminants in Food \(England\) Regulations 2013](#) makes provision for enactment and enforcement of assimilated law in GB which set out regulatory limits for contaminants in food, such as nitrate, mycotoxins, metals, 3-MCPD, dioxins and PAHs.

Read our [business guidance on contaminants](#).

Products of animal origin

If the imported food supplements or health food contain any products of animal origin then, among other requirements, this may require certification of the product, the third country and third country establishment that produce the product, must be listed with GB to import such commodities into GB. Such imports will be subject to veterinary checks at the point of entry to GB. The following contacts will be able to advise on the different types of products of animal origin.

If the product might contain any [meat, meat products, honey, milk or dairy products, eggs or their products](#) please contact the Animal and Plant Health Agency's website. APHA is an Executive Agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

We are responsible for imports from third countries of unfilled gelatine capsules and food supplements in gelatine capsules for human consumption.

However, if the capsule contains a product of animal origin then those contents may not be exempt from the import requirements that apply to animal products. This might include a requirement for an APHA Import Licence.

Examples are certain food supplements that contain:

- milk products (dried milk powder, whey or lactose)
- egg products (dried egg powder)
- meat products (any animal tissues such as thymus glands or ground bone material)
- fishery products (such as ground shell or bones)
- different, stricter import rules apply to these types of products

We provide business guidance on [importing fishery products](#), otherwise refer to [APHA's website](#) for further information.

Gelatine capsules for pharmaceutical use have separate import rules. For information on these rules you will need to contact the [Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency](#) (MHRA).

Imports from certain countries

Guidance on certain health foods or supplements which have specific information that you need to know about if importing.

Semax in Russia

Semax is used in Russia as a nutritional food administered in nasal drops for the rehabilitation of patients suffering from Parkinson's Disease, Alzheimers Disease, strokes and other serious conditions. In the UK it is considered by MHRA to be a medicine rather than a food item. Semax may only be sold or supplied in GB/UK if a marketing Authorisation has previously been granted for them.

Lead calabash chalk and clay

Calabash chalk is eaten in West Africa, as a remedy for morning sickness in pregnant women.

We advise people, especially pregnant and breast-feeding women, not to eat Calabash chalk, because FSA surveillance has revealed high levels of lead in the calabash chalk ranging from 8.2 mg/kg to 16.1 mg/kg and we consider levels over 1 mg/kg of lead in this product should be considered unfit for human consumption.

We advise pregnant and breast-feeding women not to eat calabash clay which is also known as 'sikor' or 'shikor mati' because it may contain high levels of toxic chemicals such as lead and arsenic that could harm their babies. Calabash clay is sometimes consumed by people in communities from Asia and Africa.

Food contacts

For information on safety of food contact materials and articles, including those used for food packaging please contact Food Contact Materials team [through our online form](#).

Food hygiene

For general enquiries on food hygiene please contact the Food Hygiene Policy team by email.

Further information

For [information on dietetic foods](#) please visit the Department of Health's website.