

Food supplements

What food supplements are and what you need to do as a business to sell them.

What a food supplement is

A food supplement is defined as 'any food the purpose of which is to supplement the normal diet and which is a concentrated source of a vitamin or mineral or other substance with a nutritional or physiological effect, alone or in combination and is sold in dose form'.

A wide range of nutrients and other ingredients might be present in food supplements. These can include

- vitamins
- minerals
- amino acids
- essential fatty acids
- fibre
- various plants and herbal extracts

Food supplements are intended to correct nutritional deficiencies, maintain an adequate intake of certain nutrients, or to support specific physiological functions. They are not medicinal products and as such cannot exert a pharmacological, immunological or metabolic action. Therefore, their use is not intended to treat or prevent diseases in humans or to modify physiological functions.

In the UK, food supplements are required to be regulated as foods and are subject to the provisions of general food law. In Northern Ireland, EU food law relating to food supplements will continue to apply, as listed in the [Northern Ireland Protocol](#).

Registration

To sell food supplements you must register as a Food Business Operator (FBO) with your local authority.

Selling your products

It is your responsibility to ensure that food supplements you sell are safe for consumption. There are certain things you should do to make sure they are safe.

Using a reputable supplier

Your supplier should be registered as a business with their local authority and provide fully referenced invoices and receipts.

Don't buy supplements over the internet unless you are confident the supplier is reputable.

Beware of counterfeit products, particularly if you are buying products on the internet and the product price is cheaper than other suppliers.

It is illegal to sell 2,4-dinitrophenol (DNP) for human consumption in the UK. It has been sold as a diet pill for weight loss however, it is a highly toxic industrial chemical and is not fit for human consumption.

You should report anyone selling DNP immediately to the local police, the local authority, Crimestoppers or through the National Food Crime Unit. [Our page on DNP](#) has further information on the dangers of this chemical.

Keeping records

Keep records so you can identify the business you bought food supplements from and who you sold them to. You must also keep documents like invoices and delivery notes and produce these documents if they are requested by enforcement authorities.

Labelling

Make sure the food supplements you sell are labelled correctly. If they are not, contact your supplier and arrange for return of the products or do not accept them in the first place.

How food supplements should be labelled

The product must be labelled as 'food supplement' and not 'dietary supplement'.

The product label must include:

- the business name and address, which can be placed either on the product label or product packaging. This must be either:

(a) the name of the business whose name the food is marketed under; or

(b) the address of the business that has imported the food

Food supplements sold in NI must include a NI or EU address for the food business. If the food business is not in NI or EU, they must include the address of the importer, based in NI or the EU. Food businesses can continue to use an EU, GB or NI address for the FBO on food supplements sold in GB until 30 September 2022. From 1 October 2022, food supplements sold in GB must include a UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man address for the food business. If the food business is not in GB, they must include the address of the importer, based in the UK, Channel Islands or the Isle of Man.

- a list of ingredients, including [common allergens](#) which must be emphasised
- conditions for use, including information on the recommended daily dosage and a warning not to exceed this
- storage instructions including a statement that the product should be stored out of the reach of young children
- a 'use by' or 'best before' date
- the amount of any vitamin or mineral or other substance with a nutritional or physiological effect which is present in the product
- a statement that food supplements should not be used as a substitute for a varied diet

This information must be either on:

- the packaging
- a label attached to the packaging

- a label which is clearly visible through the packaging

Importing supplements

If you import supplements into the UK, you are legally responsible for all aspects of those goods, including composition, safety and labelling of the products.

Legal requirements

Food supplements policy and legislative responsibility across the UK sits with the following organisations:

- England - the [Department of Health and Social Care](#)
- Scotland - [Food Standards Scotland](#)
- Wales - [Welsh Government](#)
- Northern Ireland - Food Standards Agency

In addition to these requirements, you must comply with specific food labelling and supplements legislation.

Legal requirements - England

[The Food Information Regulations 2014](#) and [The Food Supplements \(England\) Regulations 2003](#)

Legal requirements - Scotland

[The Food Information \(Scotland\) Regulations 2014](#) and [The Food Supplements \(Scotland\) Regulations 2003](#)

Legal requirements - Wales

[The Food Information \(Wales\) Regulations 2014](#) and [The Food Supplements \(Wales\) Regulations 2003](#)

Legal requirements - Northern Ireland

[The Food Information Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2014](#) and [The Food Supplements Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2003](#)

Changes from 1 January 2021

Food supplements are regulated by legislation made in each part of the UK (please see the Legal requirements section above). These Regulations cross refer to the Annex of Directive 2002/46/EC, which sets out rules for vitamins and minerals used in food supplements.

On 1 January 2021 The Nutrition (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 and The Nutrition (Amendment etc.) (EU Exit) Regulations 2020 came into force. These transferred responsibilities for the regulation of food supplements from EU organisations involved in the risk assessment and risk management processes to appropriate authorities and bodies in GB and reflected the Protocol on Ireland / Northern Ireland.

Therefore, from 1 January 2021 the UK has its own list of Vitamins and Minerals for use in Food Supplements and modification processes in Great Britain. For further information on these

requirements, visit [The Nutrition \(Amendment etc.\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations](#) and see [Guidance notes on legislation implementing Directive 2002/46/EC on food supplements](#).