

# The VMS market – providing supplementary benefits

As consumers take more responsibility for their own wellbeing, vitamin, minerals and supplement brands have been flying off the shelves, reports **Dawn Gay** ...

In January this year, the Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) conducted its *Health of the Nation 2021: Lockdown Focus* survey. It found that over 20 million people - 71.2 per cent of the UK population - are now using supplements on a daily basis, 19 per cent more than in 2019.

The HFMA's bio-nutritionist and community manager, Esther Mills-Roberts, explains: "The top factors influencing supplement purchases are personal research (42 per cent), which is up on our previous survey in 2019. It appears that people are seeking out information, and when they do, 88 per cent find it easy to find the right information on supplements.

"Thirty per cent of people consider supplements to be an 'investment in good health', compared to gyms (22 per cent) and organic food (19 per cent)."

The UK Vitamins and Supplements Market Report 2020 from Mintel reveals significant growth in VMS sales. According to Mintel's data, the market could see record sales of £515 million in 2021.

Sales are predicted to reach £559 million by 2025, a 13 per cent rise from 2020. Mintel says this increase in demand is most likely propelled by Covid-19, as 24 per cent of VMS users have taken more supplements during the pandemic.

Mintel's UK OTC and personal care analyst, Emilia Greenslade, says: "Strong consumer demand for VMS in the initial weeks of the pandemic led to stockpiling which impacted availability of products. While supply chains quickly returned to normal, demand has continued to remain high.

"But despite the boost in sales, the number of users remains the same with the rise in value of the category in 2020 driven by increased usage amongst existing users."

## Taking health into their hands

Reshma Malde, superintendent pharmacist at John Bell & Croyden in London's Wigmore Street, also saw the rise in VMS sales



during the pandemic. "Customers were seeking more advice around immunity and general wellbeing supplements for themselves and their relatives who were unable to get out to the pharmacy or shop online," she says.

The supply end of the VMS market chain has seen similar trends in customer behaviour. Chris Fisher, sales and marketing director at long-established UK vitamin and mineral supplier, Healthspan, says: "Unsurprisingly, health has returned to consumer's consciousness during the pandemic. We have seen a more proactive approach to wellness with the prevention of illness being the key health goal.

"As a result, the VMS market has seen an increasing number of customers switching from other healthcare categories, particularly reactive areas such as cold and flu medicines."

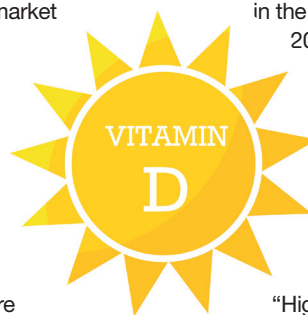
## The 'sunshine vitamin'

Despite there being little scientific evidence for vitamin D having any effect in Covid-19 prevention (according to guidance by NICE, Public Health England and the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition published in the *BMJ* 2021;372:n544 in March 2021), sales increased as the pandemic progressed.

The Mintel Global New Products Database reported a 20 per cent rise in new products containing vitamin D between January and August 2020.

Emilia Greenslade explains: "Highly publicised research linking vitamin D with protection against Covid-19 may have impacted usage, although this has been challenged by NICE which concluded that there is no evidence to support taking vitamin D supplements to prevent or treat Covid.

"Government advice may have also



impacted usage, with the government advising that people consider taking a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D."

Supplier Chris Fisher has seen spikes so acute in vitamin D demand during Covid that the market was initially unable to keep up. "This has proven to be the catalyst for a huge increase in demand for supplements containing vitamin D which we expect to last long after the virus becomes a distant memory. This resulted in an increased appetite for alternatives, with zinc, elderberry, turmeric and probiotics being the standout performers."

Says Reshma Malde: "We certainly found more customers wanting advice on the need to take additional vitamin D as there were concerns about staying indoors for longer periods than usual during lockdown. Generally, we were asked whether there were supplements that could help protect the body from Covid-19, to which we could only answer 'no'."

### Latest VMS shopping habits

The *Health of the Nation* survey lists the ten most popular food supplements as: vitamin D, multivitamins, vitamin C, fish oil/cod liver oil, vitamin A, iron, B vitamins, calcium, magnesium and zinc. "These products have gained real traction over the past year and are on a strong trajectory going forwards," says Esther Mills-Roberts.

Reshma Malde has seen more 'luxury' supplements such as LYMA, Himalayan Shilajit, Gold Cordyceps and Korean Red Ginseng leave the shelves in the last year.

Chris Fisher says that despite a surge in online sales, community pharmacy will be an important channel for vitamins and supplements. "Much of the discussion during the pandemic has been centred around the growth in online shopping and there is no doubt many major retailers have increased

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Bio-Kult Mind targets cognitive function, Bio-Kult Boosted and Bio-Kult S. Boulardii both target the digestive and immune systems and Bio-Kult Pregnéa supports pregnancy. The latest addition, Bio-Kult Brighten, targets your inner smile.

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#### Dragonfly CBD: from seed to shelf

Quality, safety and efficacy sits at the heart of the British company, Dragonfly Biosciences UK, makers of a leading seed to shelf, award winning range of CBD oils and skincare products - Dragonfly CBD.

Dragonfly CBD is available in two ranges - narrow spectrum and

broad spectrum - and in a range of strengths to take by mouth, all THC-free.

Vitamin D is included in some oral preparation. Dragonfly also produces a CBD skin care range including a body moisturiser, face cream and lip balm in a range of formats.

Visit [www.dragonflycbd.com](http://www.dragonflycbd.com)



their capabilities in this area.

"However, pharmacies have continually demonstrated the essential role they play in the community. Consumers value the advice and trust the expertise they receive in the pharmacy environment when making decisions about their health - something that cannot be replicated online."

According to McCormack Distribution, the joint care supplement sector was also affected during the pandemic with the panic buying of OTC pain management products.

Managing director Jim McCormack says:

"As we started to emerge from the first lockdown, we saw sales of our best-selling LubriSyn HA+ in local pharmacies increase as people searched for a solution to their newfound joint issues.

"We have experienced consistent in-pharmacy growth since then as consumers are looking to maintain a good level of general health and remedy any joint pain or stiffness resulting from their new work-life arrangements."

## About cannabidiol...

**Cannabidiol is a cannabinoid, a chemical compound that acts in the body and parts of the brain, and its products are becoming increasingly popular with consumers.**

CBD, which is derived from the hemp plant, is non-intoxicating and there are some who think it can alleviate stress or help with sleep problems, although such claims need to be treated cautiously.

Steve Batchelor, the marketing manager at British

Cannabis, says CBD "has in recent years seen increasing use in health supplement markets and emerging medicines."

"CBD is often an active ingredient in food supplements such as sublingual oils, capsules or edible products, or infused in topical products like creams and patches, which don't require consumption," he says.

"Many people with issues such as sleep disorders,

pain, or anxiety, try CBD. Products containing CBD are legal to stock, sell and consume in the UK, provided that food supplements are demonstratable to be THC-free. No product, whether food supplements or other, should contain more than 1mg of THC total, regardless of their size."

Chemist Dr Tim Bond at Dragonfly CBD, says increasing numbers of people are opting for natural health treatments "and CBD ticks the boxes as a natural health remedy that is backed up by evidence".

"Nearly eight million adults in the UK have bought CBD," he says. "Adjusting to a post-Covid world isn't easy and many are still anxious about engaging with the world again.

"Sleep is another area where CBD is showing great benefit, both as an adjunct but also as an approach in its own right. CBD also has proven anti-inflammatory effects and has been shown to influence a number of biochemical pathways which are known to fuel inflammation. As a result, CBD is showing great promise for pain relief."