

‘We have absolutely no idea what the adverse effects of that could be’: What’s the science skinny on ‘brain boosting’ supplements

Nootropics, also called smart drugs, have become one of the [fastest-growing](#) segments of the supplement industry. They’re marketed as products that can “enhance” the brain, promote creative thinking, and ward off cognitive decline and memory loss. As with many kinds of supplements, the actual evidence for nootropics is [modest at best](#) and sometimes non-existent, depending on the ingredient.

Another major problem with supplements, [according to study author Pieter Cohen](#), is that they’re often sold with pharmaceutical-grade ingredients that have never been approved in the U.S. by the Food and Drug Administration or even undergone any clinical testing.

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[Often], the supplement didn’t contain the listed drug at all or had other unapproved drugs that weren’t listed. In one brand, they found a whopping four nootropic drugs at once.

No drug comes without side effects. Some of the known side effects associated with these drugs include high blood pressure, insomnia, agitation, dependence, and even hospitalization. But that’s using them as intended, in doses that have been deemed safe for people (in some countries). Once you’re upping the dose fourfold or mixing in other drugs, you’re entering uncharted territory.

“You’re talking about combining drugs that have never been in combinations tested in humans,” Cohen said. “So we have absolutely no idea what the adverse effects of that could be.”

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