



**FrieslandCampina**  
Ingredients

THE INSIDE MATTERS

# The new rules of children's nutrition

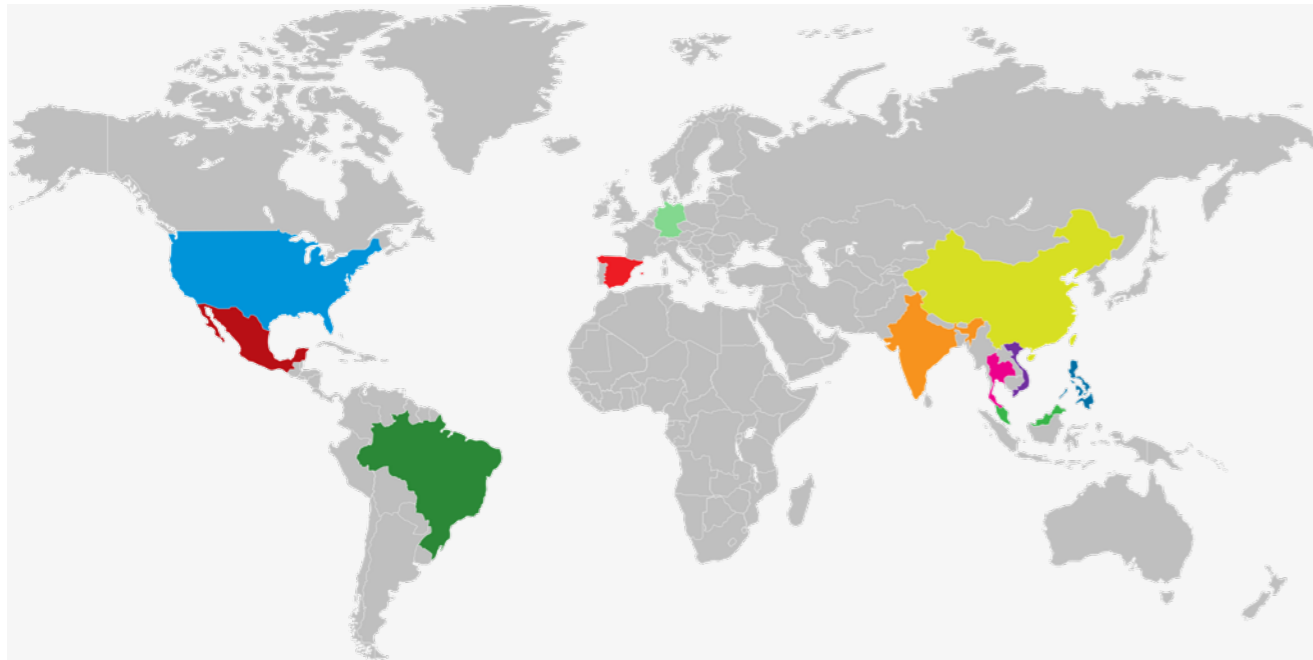
What today's parents expect  
and how brands can deliver

# A global lens on parents' perspectives

When it comes to children's nutrition, listening to the opinions of parents is priceless. As the ultimate decision-makers and buyers of children's supplements and fortified foods, creating products that appeal to mums, dads and caregivers is a winning strategy. So, what are their non-negotiables? To find out, we've conducted comprehensive qualitative research on product usage, format preferences and health priorities for children aged three to twelve years old. Our research spans across eleven markets, including North America, Latin America (Mexico and Brazil), Europe (Spain and Germany), Asia-Pacific

(India, Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam) and China.

The insights we have gained reveal several important region-specific nuances as well as global trends that highlight what parents want most. Keep reading to see how these trends open up clear opportunities for children's nutrition brands, featuring insider perspectives from Kim Stadman, Sensory & Consumer Research Specialist, and Nadia Ustinova, Global Innovation Marketing Manager, at FrieslandCampina Ingredients.



## Parent's perspectives on children's nutrition: Study design



**150+**  
parent participants



**24**  
qualitative  
focus groups



**11**  
countries across  
the globe

# Parents, priorities and proof

Parents today are more health-conscious than ever before, armed with endless digital resources and expert advice at their fingertips. This is driving demand for supplements and fortified foods and beverages that can support the nutritional needs of their children. Yet, compared with infant and adult nutrition, the children's nutrition market is still maturing – creating a clear opportunity for solutions designed specifically for the unique demands of children's growing bodies and minds.

As a result, parents' expectations for nutrition are evolving – shaped by new scientific understanding, changing lifestyles and an overwhelming desire to give their children every advantage. They want credible, trusted products that support specific health concerns and fit seamlessly with busy family life. To help brands navigate this space, we asked parents around the world what they really think about children's nutritional products. The insights reveal both universal concerns and regional nuances – and point towards clear opportunities for brands that are willing to listen.

"What struck us most in this research wasn't the differences between markets but the common wants and desires of parents from across the globe. They share similar health concerns – with immune health, brain health and gut health being top priorities – and want solutions that are natural, convenient and credible. By listening to the voices of parents and understanding their preferences, priorities and aspirations for their children, brands have the opportunity to create products that not only meet nutritional needs but also earn parental trust. This research reveals where the real whitespace lies and how to speak to parents in ways that truly resonate."

Kim Stadman Sensory & Consumer Research Specialist



# What you'll discover inside

## • WHAT PARENTS REALLY PRIORITISE

the non-negotiable health concerns driving purchase decisions

## • THE LANGUAGE THAT RESONATES

how to talk about health in ways parents actually understand

## • FORMAT PREFERENCES THAT MATTER

why format type can make or break product success

## • REGIONAL NUANCES TO WATCH

the market-specific insights that separate successful launches from those that fall short

## • PRODUCT PITFALLS TO AVOID

where well-intended products risk missing the mark with parents

## • WHITESPACE OPPORTUNITIES

product concept ideas and where to launch them

# The four non-negotiables

## 1. Immunity:

### The new baseline for healthy children

Everyday immune support is a top priority for parents worldwide – with ‘immunity’ ranking in the top three parental health concerns in every country studied. It was also the **number one concern** in Thailand, India, the Philippines, Vietnam, China, Brazil, Mexico, Germany and Spain. These findings reflect a universal truth that parents want to protect and safeguard their children by strengthening their immune health.



### Ingredient opportunity: Bioactive proteins

- Bioactive proteins are key functional components of milk, with some naturally present within milk fat globule membrane (MFGM), a lipid membrane structure naturally found in both breast milk and cow’s milk, widely recognised for its role in immune development and function.<sup>2,3</sup>
- Brands can leverage bioactive proteins to create immune health products with messaging that taps into parents’ desire for natural ingredients.



“Since the COVID-19 pandemic, immunity has become a cornerstone of consumer interest as parents want to prevent their children – and themselves – from getting sick. As a result, the global immune health supplements market is booming – dominated by vitamins, herbal extracts, probiotics, amino acids, minerals and omega-3 fatty acids.<sup>1</sup> To help brands stand out in this competitive market, our consumer insights study has uncovered a promising opportunity: parents’ strong positive association with natural ingredients, such as those found in milk, and immune health benefits.”

Nadia Ustinova  
Global Innovation Marketing Manager

“Our research confirms that brain health is a common parental health concern – globally, 54% of parents cite brain health as one of their top concerns for their young children.<sup>4</sup> But success in this category requires speaking their language. We found that many parents respond better to tangible outcomes like ‘learning ability’, ‘focus’ and ‘keeping up at school’. What’s more, parents are more likely to purchase brain health supplements for their children if they are combined with additional vitamins and minerals in an ‘all-in-one’, multi-benefit supplement.”

Kim Stadman Sensory & Consumer Research Specialist

## 2. Growing minds: Language matters

Brain health emerged as another universal parental health concern, ranking in the top three among most countries studied. But our research revealed a critical insight: while the concern is global, **the language used to talk about brain health varies by region.** Chinese parents see ‘cognition’ as an early milestone for younger children and ‘brain health’ as intelligence for older children, whereas US parents use ‘brain health’ as an umbrella term for cognitive functioning, brain development and mental health.



### Ingredient opportunity: Omega-3s

- Studies have shown that adequate levels of DHA – an omega-3 long chain polyunsaturated fatty acid – in the diet are linked to improved learning ability, attention span and memory retention in children.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>
- DHA ingredients, including those that are algae-based, deliver these brain health benefits in a format that can be easily combined with other nutrients to create the comprehensive solutions parents are seeking today.
- High-end micro-encapsulation technology protects the DHA oil within a powder matrix, ensuring both nutritional and sensory stability over time, supporting its formulation flexibility, from nutritional powders to fortified foods.



### A parent's perspective: Emotional and cognitive well-being

Across markets, emotional well-being matters deeply to parents – but the language around it is sensitive and varies widely. Importantly, in our research, parents did not use the term “mental health” to describe their children’s needs or the products they were interested in.

However, this doesn’t mean that mental and emotional well-being isn’t important to them. What parents did express was interest in tangible, everyday benefit areas such as:

- **Good sleep**
- **Calmness and emotional balance**
- **Focus and concentration**
- **Happiness and confidence**

This underscores that while language might differ, parents’ focus on mental wellness is unmistakable. They are highly receptive to products that help their children feel settled, sleep better, stay focused or manage emotional ups and downs – all key facets of good mental health.

#### Key takeaway:

Brands should lead **with familiar, positive and benefit-led language** – such as sleep, calm, focus and happiness. These benefits remove potential barriers and create a natural entry point into broader conversations around children’s mental wellbeing – an area of growing importance globally.



### 3. Gut health: A proxy for overall wellness

Gut health was positioned among the top three parental health concerns in Thailand, India, Vietnam, Germany – and it was the number one concern in the US. In fact, US parents view **gut health as a foundation** for their child’s overall health, impacting multiple body systems.

Despite many parents being aware of the gut’s role in overall well-being, awareness of specific gut health ingredients remains low, creating both a challenge and opportunity for brands.



#### Ingredient opportunity: Prebiotics

- Prebiotic GOS are widely studied across the world, with multiple clinical trials in infants and children demonstrating its benefits.
- GOS effectively stimulate beneficial gut bacteria and have been shown to reduce discomfort in constipated children.<sup>9,10</sup>
- For parents who recognise gut health as a proxy for total health, GOS also offers broader benefits, including support for immune function, healthy growth and even brain function, making it a compelling, multi-benefit ingredient for children’s gut health formulations.<sup>11,12,13,14,15</sup>
- **Whitespace:** Research in young adults has shown that GOS may influence the brain via the gut-brain axis by increasing the abundance of beneficial microbes in the gut and improving mental well-being parameters.<sup>16</sup> GOS could therefore be leveraged to support brain health and gut health propositions – two top parental health concerns.



“While parents are open to solutions that support children’s gut health, they are often unaware of how different ingredients work – for example, they might not fully understand how prebiotics differ from probiotics. As such, brands need to educate consumers on the functional benefits – but **keep it simple**. Technical language around ‘intestinal health’ or newer terms like the ‘gut-brain axis’ are well established in B2B discourse, but may require translation for parent-facing communications, as they are not always immediately understood.”

Nadia Ustinova Global Innovation Marketing Manager

#### Market spotlight: Eye health – China leading a global concern

Eye health is one of the top health priorities for Chinese parents, who strongly associate good vision with learning performance and future opportunities. Ingredients like lutein and DHA are already familiar in this context, making China an attractive early entry market. However, concerns about **screen time, digital fatigue and eye strain** are rising across all markets in our study. Parents worldwide increasingly connect excessive device use with broader well-being issues, including **reduced focus, poor sleep and lower school performance**.

#### Key takeaway:

China is the frontrunner – but global parents are not far behind. Eye health benefits, especially when tied to cognition, focus and healthy routines around screen use, represent a growing whitespace across multiple regions.

## 4.Format matters (a lot):

### Convenience rules

When it comes to children's nutrition products, format is just as critical as benefits. Our research reveals that ready-to-drink (RTD) formats and gummies are popular globally. Functional foods like bars and cookies are also favoured in certain regions like India, China, Mexico, Spain and the US. But acceptance of other formats can vary significantly by market. For instance, powdered formats and pouches are generally thought to be inconvenient, except for in Brazil, where powdered supplements are normalised, and Vietnam, where pouches resonate strongly. Chinese parents break Western conventions by accepting capsules for children, viewing them as concentrated and efficient. In Malaysia, breakfast formats work well for busy mornings, while parents in Spain and Mexico prefer snackable bars.



These format preferences reflect a **practical reality** that every parent knows – children can be tricky to feed. Whether it's getting younger kids to sit still for a full meal or catching older kids who are constantly on the go, the right format can make the difference between a supplement that sits in the cupboard and one that fits into daily routines.

### A parent's perspective: Selective eating

Parents in Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand expressed strong interest in **concentrated, compact supplements** specifically for children with poor appetites or picky eating habits. These parents worry that when their children refuse meals, they're missing essential nutrients. A multi-nutrient solution would provide peace of mind – ensuring their children still receive all the nutrients they need even on difficult eating days.

### Key takeaway:

Develop concentrated formats that deliver complete daily nutrients in a single, easy-to-consume serving for picky eaters – like small RTD solutions or nutrient shots.

“Our research revealed a common trend for ‘all-in-one’ supplements. Parents across markets – from the US to Thailand and China – consistently expressed a desire for small, convenient solutions that combine multiple vitamins, minerals and functional ingredients into one serving. This allows parents to address several health concerns for their children with one trusted product. As a result, brands that can successfully deliver multi-benefit formulations in a single solution will have a clear competitive advantage. What's more, with many parents' craving convenience, solutions that can be enjoyed by the whole family, like fortified yogurts, could catch the attention of busy families looking for all-in-one and one-for-all products.”

Kim Stadman Sensory & Consumer Research Specialist

# Turning insights into action: Building products parents' trust

Understanding parents' health priorities is key but the real task for brands is translating these insights into children's nutrition products that truly resonate. When it comes to ingredient choice, parents are generally aware of vitamins, minerals, probiotics, proteins and DHA/fish oil but are less familiar with functional ingredients like MFGM and GOS. Our research revealed that even when unfamiliar acronyms come with explanations or definitions, parents still gravitate toward ingredients that feel familiar and therefore safer.

This knowledge gap could be seen as a challenge, but for forward-thinking brands – it could be an opportunity. Here's how you can make the most of it:

- 1 Educate parents on functional ingredients:** Provide clear, simple explanations of how ingredients like MFGM and GOS work, using accessible language, visuals and relatable analogies.
- 2 Back ingredients with credible science:** Parents appreciate regulatory claims, scientific substantiation and products that are certified or approved by doctors or health experts. It helps them feel like they're making the right decisions and helps brands build trust.





## Product pitfalls

Our research identified several consistent missteps brands should avoid across markets:

Area	Parent insight	Opportunity	Markets affected
<b>Powder formats</b>	Generally seen as more suitable for babies and inconvenient for 3–12-year-olds	Focus efforts on intuitive and functional formats – but consider there are markets where powder formats are normalised (e.g. Brazil)	Mexico, Spain, Germany, India, Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam, China, US
<b>Citrus &amp; dairy combinations</b>	This combination often underperforms in several markets – likely due to the sensory mismatch in consumers' minds	Focus on fruit-forward yoghurt drinks (e.g., strawberry, peach, mixed berry) which align naturally with dairy and are considered safe, familiar and kid-friendly	India, Malaysia, Brazil, US
<b>Sugar-loaded gummies</b>	Gummies are popular for their convenience, but parents are concerned about sugar content of “candy-like” supplements	Clear “low sugar,” or “no added sugar,” messaging can restore trust and differentiate from candy gummies	Thailand, Malaysia, China, US
<b>Preservatives &amp; artificial ingredients</b>	Parents actively avoid over-processed products	Leverage natural ingredients – parents view these as a credibility driver	Vietnam, Brazil, Germany, US
<b>‘Beverage’ or ‘drink’ terminology</b>	Parents associate these terms with sugar-loaded products	Instead, use milk or yoghurt drinks, leveraging their health halo associations	China
<b>Year-round yoghurts</b>	In certain regions, parents avoid cold yoghurt products in the winter months	Explore ambient options or alternative year-round formats	India
<b>Mental health claims</b>	Parents may be sceptical of broad mental health claims, but are more receptive to concrete benefits	Brands can navigate this by leading with clear, benefit-led claims (e.g., sleep quality, calm, focus) that parents trust, and use these as stepping stones toward a broader mental-wellbeing platform	Thailand, India, China, Philippines, Germany, US
<b>Supports cognition claims</b>	Many parents find this language too technical	Words like ‘brain health’, ‘learning’ and ‘focus’ should be prioritised, as these are easier to understand	China, India
<b>Gut-brain axis terminology</b>	This does not resonate with parents as it is not intuitive enough	Brands should use simple language to explain the benefits	Germany, China, US

# Product concepts: What to launch and where

To help brands turn the perspectives of modern parents into winning nutritional products for children, we have a range of science-backed concepts that capture their non-negotiables.



## Beat the Bugs



### Flavoured yoghurt drink for a healthy immune system

Daily immune support made simple with a natural milk component (MFGM) parents associate with early life protection. Vivinal® MFGM consists of lipids and proteins including bioactive proteins that can contribute to immune development and function.<sup>17,18</sup>

**Where to launch?** Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam, China, Brazil, US, Spain



## Smarty Pants

### Berry flavoured milk for better learning

Fuel growing minds with Vana-Sana™ DHA Algae plus essential vitamins to support brain health, learning and focus. DHA intake is linked to improved learning ability, attention span and memory retention in children,<sup>5,6,7,8</sup> as well as good eyesight.<sup>19,20</sup>

**Where to launch?** Malaysia, Philippines, China, Mexico, US, Spain



## Happy Tummy



### Strawberry flavoured yoghurt for a healthy gut

Support digestive comfort by positively influencing the gut microbiota composition with the prebiotic Vivinal® GOS.<sup>21,22,23,24</sup> GOS stimulates the growth of beneficial bacteria, can help to reduce the risk of infections by enteric pathogens and improves comfort in constipated children.<sup>9,10</sup>

**Where to launch?** India, US, Germany



## Cool & Calm



### Gummies for a relaxed mind

Help kids stay calm and healthy with Vivinal® GOS combined with added vitamins (A, B6, B12, C and D). Emerging evidence suggests that GOS can modulate the gut microbiota which can in turn reduce feelings of anxiety.<sup>16,25</sup>

**Where to launch?** Thailand, India, Vietnam, Brazil, Mexico

### Top tip!

With so many parents craving natural, clean ingredients, dairy is the perfect foundation for children's nutritional solutions. Products like yoghurt and milk provide a natural source of calcium and protein and can be fortified with functional ingredients – like MFGM, GOS and DHA – and formulated into a variety of versatile dosage forms.

Want to explore these applications in more detail? [Visit here.](#)

# Ready to turn the opinions of parents into winning products?

At FrieslandCampina Ingredients, our mission is to nourish kids' next steps in life and help parents make the best choices for their family. To do so, we bring decades of expertise, and a portfolio designed to improve nutrition across every stage of childhood.

Connect with one of our experts to explore how we can support you with evidence-backed ingredients and trusted guidance that will help grow your children's nutrition offering with confidence.

Get in touch

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