

Pulse Report: Understanding health claims in online ads

September 2026



Introduction

People are increasingly seeing health and wellbeing claims while scrolling, searching and shopping online.

Some ads may help people find useful information, products or services to support their health.

Others may overpromise, blur the line between wellbeing and treatment, or reach people when they are worried about their own health or that of their children.

Health advertising can influence real-life choices: what people buy, whose advice they trust, and whether they seek help for a health concern.

This makes it important to understand not only how common different claims are, but how they are being used and where they may create a risk of consumer harm.

Alongside other regulators such as the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), Food Standards Agency (FSA) and Trading Standards, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has a key role to play in protecting consumers from misleading or harmful ads for health-related products and services.

Our work in understanding this area has been two-fold:

Pulse study

This Pulse study takes a wider look at how health claims appear across a large set of paid-for online ads in the UK.

We explore which topics are most common, the kinds of claims being made, the patterns that emerge and where there may be greater potential for consumer harm.

Consumer research

In summer 2026, we also carried out consumer research.

Together, these give us both a consumer perspective on attitudes to health and wellbeing products and services, as well as insight into the volume, types of claims and risks appearing in the online ads themselves. We draw on both in this report.



Part one: key findings and regulatory response

[An overview](#)

[ASA consumer research findings](#)

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[Conclusion and next steps](#)



Overview

This Pulse study used our [Active Ad Monitoring system](#) to capture online paid-for ads from Meta, Google, TikTok and website display over four weeks.

We found 309,000 relevant ads and used expert review to identify seven health topics of greatest regulatory concern for deeper assessment.

Across these seven topics, we identified 30,180 ads in total.

We then rated a sample of ads from each topic as low, medium or high compliance risk.

In total, we assessed and rated 582 individual ads.

Seven Priority Topics	No. of Ads	Low Risk*	Medium Risk*	High Risk*
Women's hormonal health, fertility and menopause	16,530	13%	83%	4%
Magnesium supplements	4,270	5%	91%	4%
Hair loss treatments	3,420	0%	85%	15%
Men's hormonal health and performance	1,930	3%	87%	10%
Mushroom supplements	2,440	1%	46%	53%
Research peptides	1,240	0%	57%	43%
Baby colic and reflux	350	4%	37%	59%

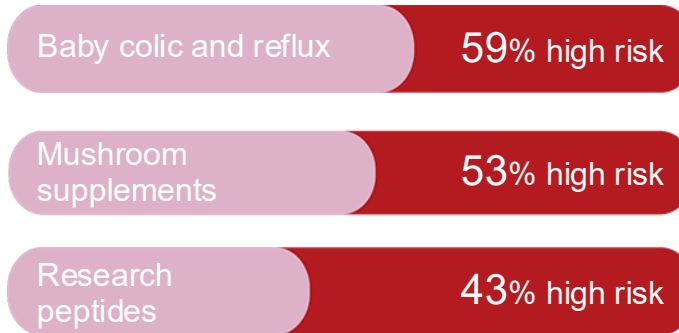
* Percentage based on the manually reviewed samples.

Overview (continued)

In every group reviewed, more than 86% of ads were rated as medium or high compliance risk, indicating widespread likely breaches of the rules.

The largest number of ads identified were for women's hormonal health, fertility and menopause products and services, with 16,530 ads in the dataset.

Serious health and safety risk was more concentrated in the three smallest topics:



Baby colic and reflux accounted for less than 1% of healthcare ads, but had the highest proportion of high-risk ads. This was largely driven by ads for sleep devices, making claims and promoting products that could pose a serious risk of physical harm to infants.

Many high-risk mushroom supplement ads focused on serious lung and respiratory concerns, with some going as far as reassuring smokers that they could continue smoking if they used the product.

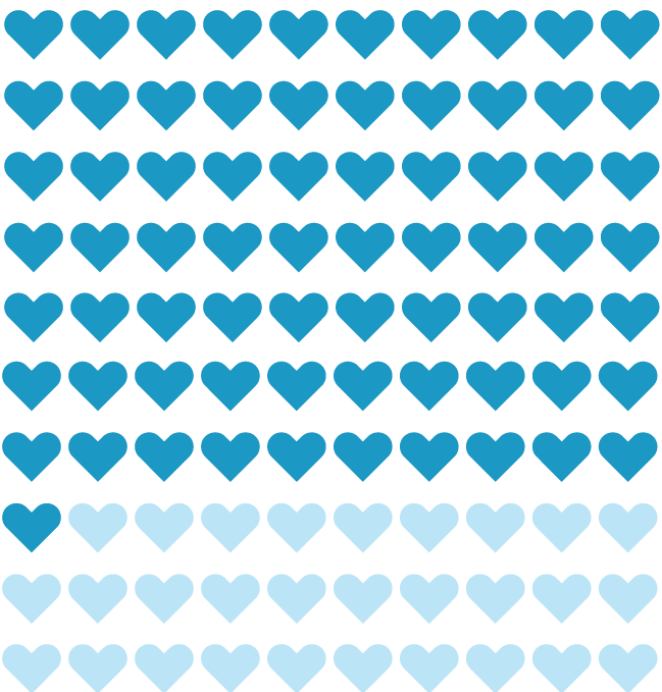
Direct references to countering the side-effects of weight-loss from GLP-1s, including hair loss and fatigue, were a notable emerging trend across some of the topics.

Across the topics, we saw a recurring pattern: ads targeting potentially vulnerable consumers and presenting products as safe, medically backed or a better option than conventional treatment or advice.

**ASA
Consumer
research
findings**

Public attitudes uncover vulnerabilities

Our research shows that 71% of adults say looking good and feeling healthy has a positive impact on their confidence and wellbeing.



However, we also found that:

31%

A third of adults feel pressure to present the best version of themselves – rising to over half (57%) of women aged 18-34.

55%

Just over half of all adults agree that men are judged more on their appearance than they used to be.



Two in five adults (40%) say they prefer to take control of their own health decisions rather than relying solely on doctors.

17%

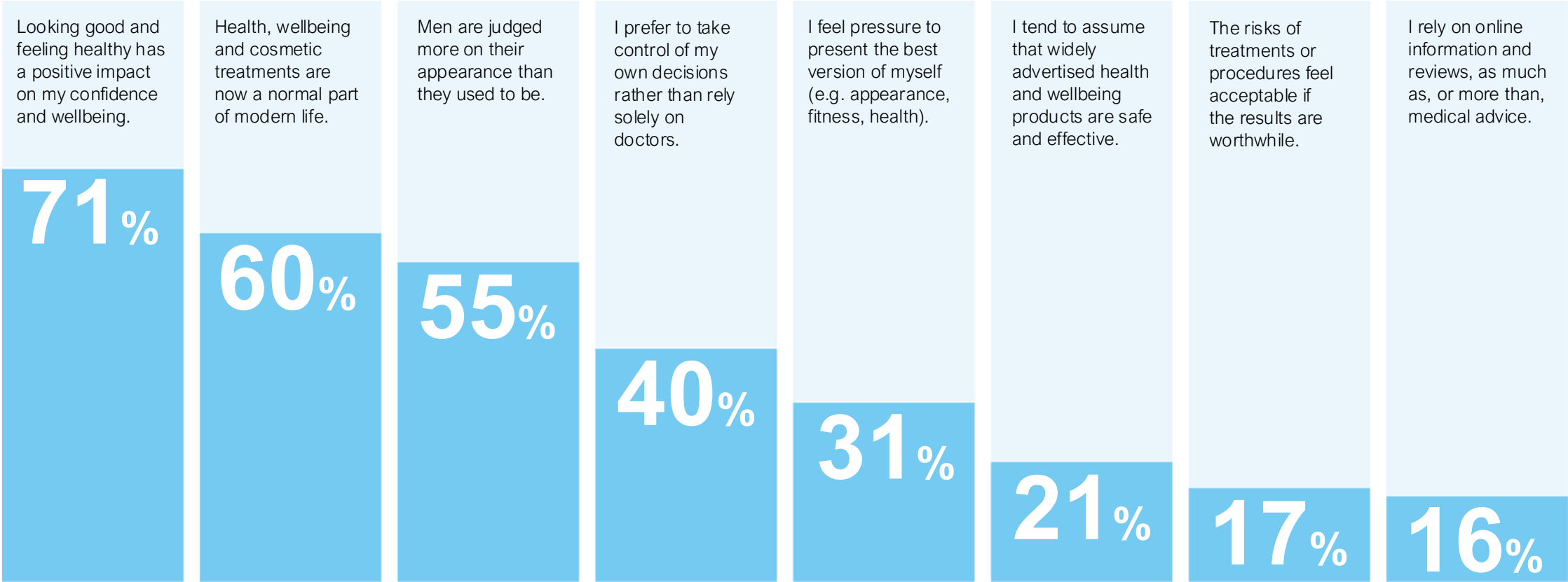
Almost one in five agree that the risks of treatments/ procedures feel acceptable if the results are worthwhile – this is significantly higher among 18-34-year-olds (25%).



One in five (21%) adults say they assume widely advertised health and wellbeing products are safe and effective – agreement with this statement rises significantly among 18-34s (30%).

Public attitudes uncover vulnerabilities (continued)

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



Source: YouGov Plc/ASA. Online survey of 2,126 adults (18+), July 2026



ASA Pulse Report findings

Seven priority topics selected for in-depth review

Topic	What it covers
Baby colic and reflux	Infant reflux, colic, sleep and soothing claims.
Mushroom supplements	Supplements promoted with treatment-style claims.
Research peptides	Products that should be used for research purposes only and must not be marketed for use by consumers. These were targeted at people with weight loss, anti-ageing and body optimisation claims.
Women's hormonal health, fertility and menopause	Menopause, PMS, PCOS and fertility concerns linked to hormone balance and control.
Men's hormonal health and performance	Libido, testosterone, prostate and ageing claims framed around performance and masculinity.
Magnesium supplements	One familiar supplement linked to many symptoms, from sleep and stress to serious health concerns.
Hair loss treatments	Appearance, confidence and treatment-style claims.

What the analysis shows

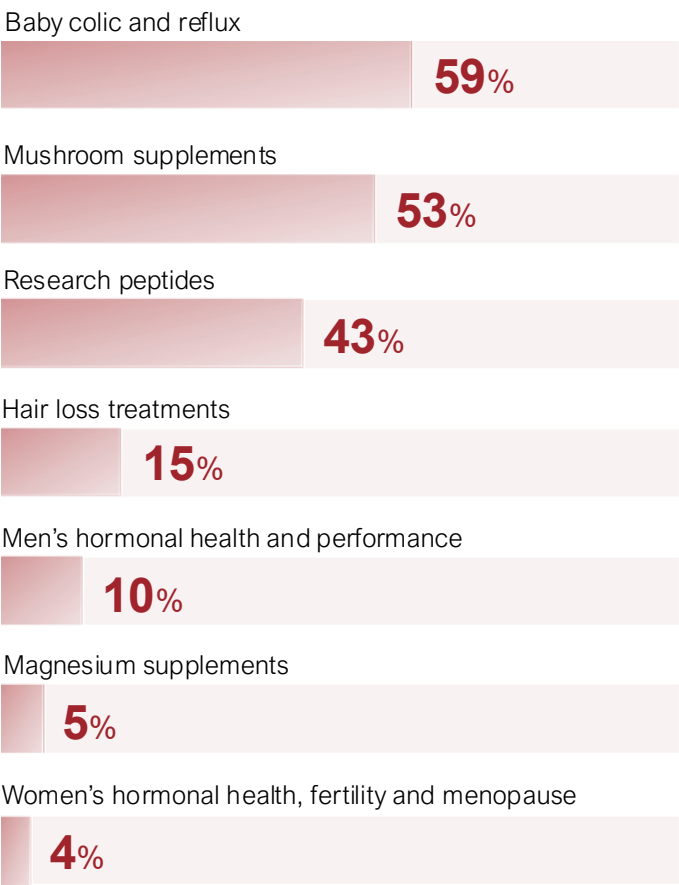
The topics with the most ads were not necessarily the highest risk.

Some smaller topics raised the greatest concerns because they involved vulnerable audiences, claims that made products sound like treatments, or the potential for serious harm.

Number of ads



Percentage of ads assessed as high risk



The three highest risk areas

Topic	Ads	What we found	Why it matters
Baby colic and reflux	350	59% were assessed as high risk , and of those, 60 ads were identified for follow-up action due to risk of physical harm. Nearly all referenced symptoms or conditions.	A small topic with high concern, involving babies and parents looking for help with reflux, colic, sleep and soothing.
Mushroom supplements	2,440	53% were high risk and 84% referenced symptoms or conditions. 50 ads were identified for follow-up action due to risk of physical harm.	Ads used treatment, reversal, respiratory and smoking-related claims alongside reassurance and credibility-building language.
Research peptides	1,240	43% were high risk . Fewer ads directly named symptoms.	“Research use” and other scientific language could sit alongside consumer-focused claims and signals around injectable products.

Baby colic and reflux

Less than 1% of healthcare ads, but with the highest risk share across the topics (59% rated high risk).

The NHS and The Lullaby Trust recommend that babies sleep on a firm, flat mattress in a clear, separate sleep space.

The Lullaby Trust advises against inclining, tilting or propping a baby, cot or mattress, and against products that keep babies in an inclined position, as these can restrict a baby's airway and increase the risk of SIDS*.

Of the ads assessed, 56% were for sleep and elevation devices, which ranged in claim strength from supporting or reducing symptoms, to preventing colic, fixing or stopping reflux, or treating an underlying issue.

25% of the ads for elevation devices presented lying flat as part of the problem and incline or positioning as the solution, with claims about reducing reflux, distress or improving sleep.

The AI generated ad example depicts a baby strapped into the sleep device, which was a common feature of the products we saw, however anything that wedges or straps a baby in place can pose a risk to babies under 12 months.

Some ads directly targeted sleep-deprived or first-time parents.

Other conditions named in the ads included flat head syndrome and Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), alongside risk-reduction claims.

Other Products

Ads for 'Anti-Colic' baby bottles claimed valves or vents reduce swallowed air, gas, bubbles or wind; some also emphasised the bottles mimic breastfeeding or control flow.

Ads for parent and baby classes and support services were lower risk, often promoting massage, yoga, relaxation and settling techniques, often combined with parental confidence or coping support.

BabySleep™
ELEVATED SLEEP CRADLE

Exhausted from sleepless nights and constant crying?

Help your baby (and you) get the rest you both need.

15° Doctor-recommended 15° angle to ease colic & reflux

Safe, secure sleeping space

A CALMER TOMORROW STARTS WITH BETTER SLEEP

Shop Now →

AI generated ad example

*Lullaby Trust: [Are sleep positioners safe for babies?](#), [Sleeping position](#), [Safer sleep in early years settings](#), [Warning about some popular baby sleeping products](#)
NHS: [Newborn and baby sleeping advice for parents](#)

Mushroom supplements

A small category but 53% of assessed ads were identified as high risk.

We found mushroom supplement ads targeting serious lung and respiratory concerns, including COPD, asthma and smoking-related lung damage.

Claims ranged from general “lung support” to much stronger language about clearing mucus, dissolving build-up, repairing lung tissue, reversing COPD and addressing the “root cause” of breathing problems.

Some ads compared the products to conventional medical treatment, such as inhalers, suggesting they only mask symptoms while the product could repair, clear or fix damage.

The smoking claims were particularly strong. Ads suggested people could improve their lungs without quitting, and in some cases reassured smokers they could keep smoking if they used the product, for example:

The cigarettes aren't the problem anymore, the buildup is

Clear your lungs. Keep smoking

[Product] gave me permission to keep smoking

Smoke all you want. Just clean your lungs daily

The advertisement for WellSupp LungBalance features a female nurse in blue scrubs with a stethoscope, standing in a clinical setting. To her left is a bottle of the supplement, labeled 'WellSupp LungBalance MUSHROOM COMPLEX' with ingredients 'CORDYCEPS + REISHI + TURKEY TAIL + SHIITAKE' and '60 CAPSULES DIETARY SUPPLEMENT'. The ad includes the following text and graphics:

- WellSupp™** NATURAL WELLNESS FOR REAL LIFE
- Support your lungs, even if you never put the cigarettes down.**
- ICU NURSE RECOMMENDS** (in a circular badge): "I've seen real improvements in my patients."
- Three green circular icons with text:
 - Lungs icon: Repairs lung health and function
 - Shield icon: Addresses both the symptoms and root causes of respiratory challenges.
 - Leaf icon: Natural mushroom blend
- RISK-FREE TRIAL** 60 DAYS • MONEY BACK GUARANTEE
- SHOP NOW →** (in a green button)

AI generated ad example

Mushroom supplements (continued)

Some ads also targeted other serious conditions, including Multiple Sclerosis (MS), stroke recovery, ADHD, anxiety, menopause and chronic inflammation.

In many of the ads, the same pattern appeared: ads identified a health problem, suggested conventional treatment or therapy was incomplete, then positioned the supplement as the missing piece.

Ads referencing MS leaned into rebuilding and repair, with claims such as:

supports the repair process your treatment plan has been missing

Relieve MS decline – naturally

your brain has been sitting in the ruins waiting for building materials

Stroke recovery ads used stronger treatment-style wording, including:

if your stroke recovery has stalled

therapy alone will never be enough

give your brain what it's been starving for

Research peptides

A small category with 43% of ads assessed as high risk.

Unlike ordinary consumer products, some medicines cannot legally be advertised in the UK. Unauthorised research peptides* should be used for research purposes only and must not be marketed for use by consumers.

Examples in this category often looked on the face of it like business-to-business or laboratory supply ads on the surface, using language around manufacturers, distributors, labs, wholesale pricing, purity and certificates of analysis.

However, many ads also implied the products were for consumer use, for example by offering small order quantities, direct WhatsApp ordering, discounts, fast home delivery, discreet shipping and linking product benefits to specific health, body goals or symptoms.

“Research use only” or “not for human consumption” wording did not always match the wider tone, imagery and route to purchase.



The advertisement is a vertical banner with a dark blue header. The header text reads: **RESEARCH PEPTIDES**, **99.8% ULTRA-HIGH PURITY PEPTIDES**, and *Direct from source factory — for serious distributors.* Below the header, there are three circular icons with corresponding text: a flask icon for **FOR BOTH SMALL AND LARGE DISTRIBUTORS**, a gear icon for **CUSTOM FORMULATIONS** (for beauty & slimming programs), and a person icon for **SPECIALISED IN** (weight-management, skin repair, collagen-boosting, and anti-aging peptides). The background of the ad shows a laboratory setting with a vial labeled **RESEARCH COMPOUND** and *FOR RESEARCH USE ONLY NOT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION*. At the bottom, there are three buttons: **WHOLESALE PRICING FROM 1 UNIT** (with a truck icon), **B2B & PERSONAL PURCHASES** (with a box icon), and **MESSAGE US ON WHATSAPP** (with a WhatsApp icon).

AI generated ad example

*Peptides that modify a physiological function by exerting a pharmacological, immunological or metabolic action, or are marketed using medicinal claims, could be classed as a medicinal product. Such products would require a marketing authorisation from the MHRA. There are some peptides which are licenced medicinal products in the UK, such as GLP-1s. They are prescription-only and cannot legally be advertised to the public

Research peptides (continued)

Consumer research* adds to the concern.

Awareness of peptides is already relatively high at 27% among adults aged 18+. While current use is low at 1%, 4% say they would consider using peptides in future. This rises to 8% among women aged 35-54.

Coded language was a distinctive part of the peptide advertising landscape.

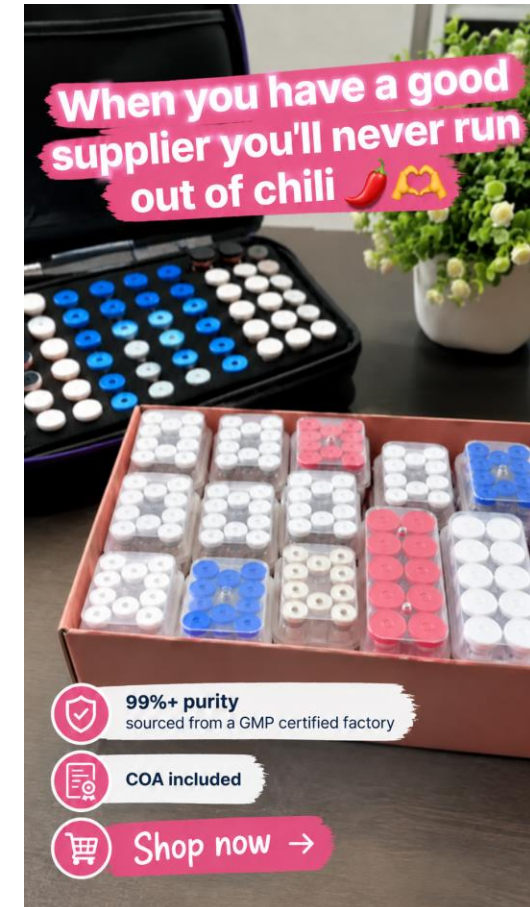
Some ads used chemical abbreviations (for example “RT” to refer to Retatrutide) or unusual terms, most notably references to “chili” and “chili peppers”, and phrases such as “endless supply of chili peppers” or “you will get a refrigerator of peppers”.

This language was used alongside images of peptide vials, fridges, syringes or product names in the creative.

The use of coded language may have been used to signal the sale of peptides without naming them directly, which might make it more challenging for platforms to identify the product being advertised, while still being understood by interested consumers.

Some ads used treatment-style or problem-solution language. Products were linked to belly fat, menopause or PCOS weight gain, type 2 diabetes, insulin resistance, joint pain, tendinopathy, labral degeneration, hair loss, anxiety, stress, cognition, sleep and recovery.

Some examples went further and presented peptides as alternatives or additions to established care, including claims around cancelling cortisone injections, tissue repair, regenerative support, blood vessel growth and collagen production.



AI generated ad example

*Source: YouGov Plc/ASA. Online survey of 2,126 adults (18+), July 2026

Other priority topics

We also identified and assessed ads in four other priority topic areas:

- 1

Women's hormonal health, fertility and menopause
- 2

Magnesium supplements
- 3

Hair loss treatments
- 4

Men's hormonal health and performance

The figures suggest that the risk of likely CAP Code breaches is widespread across all seven sectors, although the risk to health or safety is more limited in these four other priority topics.

Women's hormonal health, fertility and menopause was the largest category, with 16,530 ads. While a significant percentage of ads were assessed as medium risk (83%) it rated the lowest of all seven topics for ads assessed as high risk (4%).

Magnesium supplements and hair loss treatments were the second and third largest categories, with 4,270 and 3,420 ads respectively. High-risk content was more prominent in hair loss treatment ads, where 15% were assessed as high risk, compared with 5% for magnesium supplements.

Men's hormonal health and performance was a smaller category, with 1,930 ads, but there was a notable level of high-risk content at 10%.

Women's hormonal health, fertility and menopause		
16,530 ads	83% medium risk	4% high risk
Magnesium supplements		
4,270 ads	91% medium risk	5% high risk
Hair loss treatments		
3,420 ads	85% medium risk	15% high risk
Men's hormonal health and performance		
1,930 ads	87% medium risk	10% high risk

Percentages based on the manually reviewed samples.

Women's hormonal health, fertility and menopause

Ads turned common experiences — menopause, PMS, PCOS, bloating, weight gain, fertility concerns and tiredness — into signs of hormone imbalance that food supplements or other non-medicinal products could help fix.



AI generated ad example

Some ads used emotive language about women feeling dismissed, unlike themselves or let down by doctors, making supplements feel like a route back to control.

Fertility and PCOS claims were less common, but it was noted that ads referenced ovulation, egg quality, embryo protection, cravings, weight gain and fertility support.



Men's hormonal health and performance

Men's health ads often reframed health concerns as performance concerns, especially around erections, libido, testosterone, ageing, prostate symptoms, body shape and confidence.



AI generated ad example

The standout pattern was insecurity-led messaging, with ads suggesting low libido, erectile problems or ageing could affect masculinity, confidence or relationships.

Several ads presented supplements, devices or “*natural*” remedies as alternatives to prescription medicines, testosterone products or Viagra-style treatments.



Magnesium supplements

Magnesium ads stretched one familiar supplement across a very wide range of concerns, from sleep and stress to digestion, menopause, heart and bone health, prostate symptoms and weight loss.



AI generated ad example

Sleep, calm and stress claims were especially common, and sometimes edged towards anxiety, brain fog or broader health concerns.

The most concerning ads criticised conventional medicine or implied magnesium was a safer, simpler or more natural alternative for serious health problems.



Hair loss treatments

Hair loss ads were broader than expected: alongside male pattern baldness, many ads targeted female hair loss linked to menopause, PCOS, thyroid issues and GLP-1 medication.

Ads often presented hair loss as having a clear underlying cause, with products framed as blocking DHT, supporting regrowth or treating the trigger rather than just improving appearance.

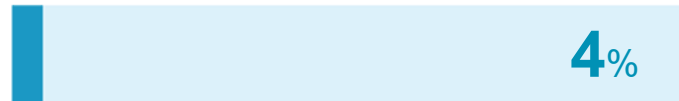
The emotional framing was strong, with ads linking hair loss to confidence, insecurity and self-worth, often supported by before-and-after imagery or video stories.

Awareness and intent – hair loss treatments

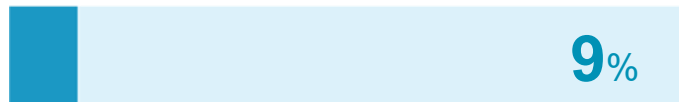
Aware of hair loss treatments



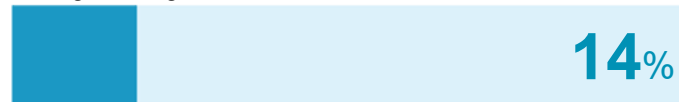
Currently using hair loss treatments



Would consider future use



Young men aged 18-34 who would consider future use



Women who would consider future use



Our research* showed that 67% of UK adults are aware of hair loss treatments. 4% say they are currently using them and 9% would consider using them in the future.

Young men, aged 18-34, were significantly more likely to consider future use of hair loss treatments (14%).

10% of women would consider using hair loss treatments in the future.

*Source: YouGov Plc/ASA. Online survey of 2,126 adults (18+), July 2026

Emerging trend – countering GLP-1 side-effects

Data from our most recent consumer survey* shows:

79% | UK adults are aware of "weight loss injections".

7% | Report they are currently using them.

14% | State that they would consider using them in the future – this was higher amongst women aged 35-54 (20%) and those with diabetes (30%).

We saw a number of ads across different topics which were aimed at people using GLP-1 medications.

They made direct references to countering the side-effects of weight loss from GLP-1s.

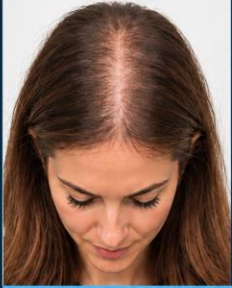
For example:

“ reduced glp side-effects like nausea, bloating, and fatigue” – Magnesium supplements ad

GLP-1 RESULTS SHOULDN'T COME AT THE COST OF YOUR HAIR.

Hair loss is a known side effect of GLP-1 medications.

SUPPORT THICKER, HEALTHIER HAIR WITH OUR CLINICALLY INSPIRED TOPICAL SERUM

BEFORE	AFTER 4 MONTHS
	

REAL RESULTS. REAL CONFIDENCE.

AI generated ad example

*Source: YouGov Plc/ASA. Online survey of 2,126 adults (18+), July 2026

Language themes across topics

Personal transformation and optimisation

Ads often promise a better version of life by addressing a specific health concern. Others emphasised how products can enhance physical and mental performance to achieve peak vitality, rather than just treating or preventing sickness.

For example:

"Bring back intimacy she's been missing.

Thousands of men call it the reason their marriage feels alive again" – Men's hormonal health.

"Unlock your potential" – Research Peptides.

Targeting people at vulnerable moments

Several topics use language aimed at people who may already feel anxious, embarrassed, exhausted or let down by other options.

This includes parents worried about babies, people concerned about weight, sleep, pain or hair loss, men worried about sexual performance or masculinity, and women experiencing menopause symptoms.

Medical authority

Across the topics, ads often refer to doctors, white coats, laboratory language, "clinical" claims, testing and professional endorsement, making products feel safe and credible.

Conversely, some ads suggest conventional treatments, prescriptions or medical advice have not worked, while the advertised product offers a better or more personal solution.

In a smaller number of ads, both approaches appear together, with medical credibility used to support a message that questions traditional medicine.

Risk-free buying and social influence

Money-back guarantees, free trials, discounts, star ratings, large customer numbers, highly emotive testimonials and "best-selling" claims appear repeatedly. These signals make the decision feel low-risk and popular.

Safe and trustworthy

Many ads use words such as natural, herbal, drug-free, hormone-free, no prescription and no side-effects to make products appear gentle or lower risk.

This can be compelling because it offers a simple answer to health concerns, but it may also downplay the need for proper advice or evidence.



Conclusions

1

Our Pulse study found widespread compliance issues across the seven priority issues we identified. Some of the smallest topics showed the greatest potential for harm, especially where ads involved vulnerable audiences, potentially unsafe products or treatment-style claims.

2

Many ads were for food supplements and made explicit or implied claims to be able to prevent, treat or manage health conditions, despite that being against the rules.

3

We saw the same patterns across different topics: products were presented as “the answer people were looking for”, while personal stories, risk-free guarantees and reassuring language made risky or unsupported claims seem safe and believable.

4

This report shows the value of data-driven proactive monitoring to help us to identify patterns, including where advertising concerns overlap with product safety, consumer vulnerability or wider regulatory risks.



What next? Building on existing regulatory work

Health claims in ads are already a priority for the ASA. Recent rulings, projects and intelligence sharing with regulatory partners have tackled many of the same risks identified by this report:

- Evidence gaps
- Reassuring health claims
- Safety concerns
- Consumers who may be motivated by worry, unmet need, or frustration with existing options

For example:

In 2024

The ASA published an upheld ruling for an ad that showed a baby in an unsafe sleep position. Separately, in 2025, the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) issued a Safety Alert for baby sleep pillows following child fatalities in the UK and overseas.

In 2025

The ASA upheld rulings against online ads presenting food supplements as “natural GLP-1” or “Faux-Zempic” alternatives. The ads made unauthorised medicinal and weight-loss claims and were identified through the Active Ad Monitoring system.

In 2026

Following proactive work using our Active Ad Monitoring system, the ASA published five rulings on food supplement ads that claimed to help with symptoms of the menopause, and four rulings on ads making claims about the treatment of prostate issues.

Enforcement action is ongoing in these areas, the outcome of which will be published in more detail later this year.



What next? Responding to the findings

This Pulse study will help us to prioritise where targeted follow-up is needed and will have the greatest impact.

It is concerning that the majority of online ads in significant parts of the health sector were found to be in likely breach of the ad rules.

Our immediate priority is addressing ads which raised the highest risks of harm:

Baby sleep devices

We are liaising with regulatory partners in relation to ads for baby sleep devices.

Mushroom supplements

We are carrying out further work in relation to ads for mushroom supplements which made egregious claims presenting a clear risk of harm to the public.

We will publish the outcomes in due course.

We will also:

- Consider the findings more broadly and determine what further regulatory action we should take.
- Liaise with partner regulators and industry bodies to share findings and determine how to respond to that challenge.
- Work with platforms, which have an important role to play in driving standards and reducing the number of harmful ads people see online.
- Continue to use monitoring to keep pace with the fast-moving online health market and spot emerging risks.
- Ensure we continue to focus our resources on protecting the most vulnerable consumers.



Part two: further detail and methodology

[Approach](#)

[How we assessed risk](#)

[ASA consumer research methodology](#)

[Pulse Report methodology](#)

[Limitations](#)



Approach

The ASA's Active Ad Monitoring system

captured ads across Google, Meta, TikTok and website display over 4 weeks (26 May – 22 June 2026)



309,000
healthcare ads
identified



Data Science
grouped ads into
broad themes



**We identified
7 priority topics**
based on scale, potential
vulnerability, claim types,
risk and other factors



Experts
reviewed samples
in detail



Further analysis

Claims, products/
services, medical
supervision, risk,
language and
presentation



How we assessed risk

Risk levels reflect both the likelihood of a CAP Code breach and the potential for physical or mental harm to people who saw the ads, including those who may have gone on to buy or use the promoted products or services.

We also took into account whether the ads were aimed at vulnerable groups.

Topic	What we found
Low	Ad is unlikely to raise an issue under the Code or present a risk of harm.
Medium	Ad is likely to breach the Code, but would require further investigation to confirm, and presents no serious health or safety risk in isolation.
High	Ad poses a potential health or safety risk, unsafe practice, or unlawful/unsafe product, and/or is a clear breach of the CAP Code.

Where particularly serious concerns were identified, ads were escalated for further action. These assessments were based on a concern about risks of physical harm due to potentially unsafe products or the encouragement of unsafe practices.



ASA public research methodology

Online survey conducted by:
YouGov Plc.

Sample:
2,126 adults aged 18+ across the UK

Fieldwork:
2-7 July 2026

Figures have been weighted and are
representative of all UK adults (18+)



Pulse Report methodology

Using the ASA's Active Ad Monitoring system, which collects online ads at scale, we captured ads from Meta, Google, website display and TikTok shown between 26 May and 22 June 2026 inclusive.

Ads were initially identified using a broad set of more than 450 healthcare-related keywords.

Because some of these keywords have both healthcare and generic meanings, not all ads captured at this stage were relevant to healthcare.

To remove irrelevant ads, a filtering model was developed to identify those likely to relate to healthcare.

Applying this model produced a dataset of approximately 309,000 ads, which formed the basis of the analysis.

The model achieved a precision of 0.82, meaning that around 82 of every 100 ads it classified as healthcare-related were relevant, and recall of more than 0.97, meaning that it identified more than 97 of every 100 healthcare ads in the validation sample.

The subsequent analysis followed a staged approach:

1. Using data science techniques, the adverts were grouped into 72 similar clusters.
2. A sample of adverts from each cluster was reviewed by the project team to assess potential harm, regulatory issues and consumer relevance.
3. Based on this review the team then identified seven rity topics which would be suitable for a deep dive, those chosen were: men's hormonal health and performance; women's hormonal health, fertility and menopause; mushroom supplements; baby colic and reflux; magnesium supplements; research peptides; and hair loss treatments.

Pulse Report methodology (continued)

For each priority topic, a more targeted filter was applied to the 309,000 healthcare ads to identify the ads relevant to that topic.

These categories were not mutually exclusive, so an ad could appear in more than one topic.

For example, an ad for a magnesium supplement claiming to prevent hair loss could be included in both the magnesium supplements and hair loss treatment groups.

The performance of each topic filter was assessed against a human-labelled dataset to help ensure that the ads assigned to each group were relevant.

Deep-dive analysis was carried out for each priority topic, combining quantitative analysis with qualitative assessment and specialist input.

The project team, supported by specialist colleagues in food and health and medicines, manually labelled around 100 ads per topic against criteria such as compliance risk, the type of product/service being advertised, and if the ad mentioned a medical condition.

Common qualitative themes were also extracted. This analysis was not intended to make formal compliance determinations.

Instead, it provided a structured evidence base to identify areas that may warrant further scrutiny, specialist review or follow-up regulatory activity.

Limitations

1. The data was sourced through ad library scraping and cannot be assumed to provide a complete or fully representative picture of all online healthcare advertising.

This is particularly relevant to Meta and TikTok. While the dataset provides broad coverage of healthcare advertising during the period reviewed, some ads will not have been captured.

2. The filtering and classification methodology was designed to provide a robust basis for analysis but is not perfect.

As reflected in the model performance measures, some relevant ads may have been missed, and some irrelevant ads may have been included. The same limitation applies to the topic-specific filters used for the deep dives.