

**THE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES, ST AUGUSTINE**  
**CAMPUS PERCEPTION OF DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS IN ENHANCING THEIR**  
**MENTAL CAPACITY**

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**Background:** The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) defines both the terms "dietary ingredient" and "new dietary ingredient" as components of dietary supplements<sup>1</sup>. In order for an ingredient of a dietary supplement to be a "dietary ingredient," it must be one or any combination of the following substances: a vitamin, a mineral, an herb or other botanical, an amino acid, a dietary substance for use by man to supplement the diet by increasing the total dietary intake (e.g., enzymes or tissues from organs or glands), or a concentrate, metabolite, constituent or extract<sup>1</sup>.

**Objective:** Dietary supplements used for enhancing brain capacity has proven to have an alarmingly high success rate in students, however not all students and the general population alike have a favourable opinion about them. The objective of this research was to ascertain student perceptions of dietary supplements in enhancing their mental capacity.

**Design:** A convenient sample of one hundred and twenty participants from the University of the West Indies, St Augustine campus partook in the pilot study during November 2009. A questionnaire was administered to participants which included - demographics, attitudes, perception and opinions. Additionally, statically reports based on most purchased dietary supplements for enhancing brain capacity was obtained from two pharmacies located in north Trinidad in the campus environs.

**Results:** Most participant of the study were unconcerned with the use of dietary supplements, although the majority of the study found them safe to be consumed. The subjects found that no additional benefits were gained from them, and they were unhelpful in enhancing their mental faculties. The subjects were seen to have an indifferent opinion of supplement usage.

**Conclusion:** Although students do purchase and consume dietary supplements to enhance their mental capacities it can be clearly noted that they have no true belief in its ability. Most purchase and consume these supplements due to urges from parents or a psychological need to prove to themselves that they are utilizing every avenue available to aid their memory retention regardless of if they see an improvement or not.

