



Formulating for gamers and beyond

by Jenna DeShayes and Meg Ligot

The global esports market size was valued at \$1.1 billion in 2019, and is expected to expand at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 24.4% from 2020 to 2027, according to a [market analysis report](#) from Grand View Research. Some of the key esports market growth drivers include increasing audience reach and the steady growth of streaming on popular platforms such as Twitch and YouTube.

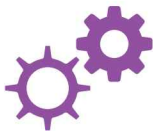
Further demonstration of the rapid market growth in esports and the category's credibility is its presence in competitive collegiate varsity athletics, where many schools are now offering esports scholarships for gamers. While esports continue to gain popularity among professionals and everyday gamers—and the market size is also experiencing steady growth—it's no surprise that interest in supplements to support health and gaming performance is also increasing.

Though esports may not immediately come to mind when thinking about nutritional supplementation, it's important to look at the growing esports space like any other market segment—to determine how to provide the best solutions and benefits to complement people's lifestyles.

Benefits trends

When approaching supplement ideation, product development and formulation in this market, brands should consider the main benefits gamers are seeking, such as:

Some interesting trends in esports from a benefits perspective include:



Mental focus and clarity



Energy without jitters



Improved reaction time

Vision and blue light protection – This formulation approach provides a protective element to gamers' supplement stacks, and is a great bonus not often seen in current formulations on the market.

Trademarked nootropics – Many serious gamers like to see clinical dosages and research to back the products they take, so trademarked nootropics and esports-targeted ingredients are currently big sellers.

Supplement delivery formats

The most common delivery formats for esports supplements are drinks (powdered or ready-to-drink [RTD] formulations), capsules and softgels.

Among them, drinks still appear to be the leading choice for gamers. Convenience and the ability to sip intermittently as part of the gaming experience factor into the popularity of supplement drinks in esports.

Additionally, supplement drinks are heavily promoted by influencers in the esports space, which can then be a gateway for the broader gaming audience to tap into this product category. A lot of top streamers have formed brand partnerships, using strategic product placement in their streams, displaying promotional items behind them like branded refrigerators, flags and a lineup of supplement drinks for their viewers to see. The reach of influencers in this space can be a great channel to get the average consumer interested in learning more about esports supplements and ultimately purchasing products in this market.

Gaming was created to provide players with an experience, so when it comes to product development, supplements should also be experiential. Gamers want to feel the mental focus, energy and other benefits of supplements, but also want to enjoy the flavors of the products they are consuming in a convenient and fun format. As such, drinks will likely remain a frontrunner in this space.

Key ingredients, considerations

In product development, we recommend identifying where consumers are challenged or looking to gain an edge in certain areas, and then approaching a formulation strategy to best address those needs. For esports formulation, several key areas can be targeted, depending on a brand's objectives:

Sustained energy – Gaming supplements are formulated to be sustainable for gamers to use instead of spiking up their energy all at once. The idea is an energized mental experience instead of one that's largely physiological like a pre-workout or highly caffeinated energy drink. For gaming supplement formulation, we remove blood-flow enhancers, beta-alanine (which causes tingles) and high doses of caffeine.

As a result, we're utilizing natural forms of caffeine, such as organic alternatives and caffeine from green coffee beans. We also look at including forms of caffeine that provide slower or sustained releases, as well as adding in B vitamins that can help minimize the traditional caffeine crash.

Other new formulation strategies for sustained energy products we're starting to use include interesting trademarked ingredients with great science behind them. Examples of these trademarked ingredients include Biozomal Caffeine (from Lief Raws), which boasts the use of liposomal technology to extend the life of traditional caffeine; and Dynamine (from Compound Solutions Inc.), a rapid-onset energy and focus ingredient.



Mental clarity and focus – Much like in the broader health and wellness space, nootropics are gaining popularity in esports formulation as ingredients that potentially support mental clarity and focus. We're using ingredients like adaptogen mushrooms to assist with increased focus, as well as memory, in esports supplements (Phytother Res. 2009;23[3]:367-372). Huperzine A, a naturally occurring compound that comes from Chinese club moss, is also being used more frequently for cognitive function support and focus (Ann Pharmacother. 2009;43[3]:514-518).

Vision and eye health – Vision and eye health support is definitely a key area impacted by the esports lifestyle, due to gamers experiencing very lengthy periods of screen time with prolonged blue-light exposure.

A number of formulation components may help with vision, but one of the primary ingredients currently being used in the esports product space for eye health support is lutein—a naturally derived marigold extract, with a trademarked ingredient on the market called Lutemax 2020 (from OmniActive).

Experience and flavor – Given the demographics of the esports market and the high engagement aspects of gaming, the experience and flavor of esports supplements are also important considerations in formulation and product development.

Bold and nostalgic flavors, colors like rainbow candies and slushies, or even popping candies can all contribute to a more experiential product that appeals to gamers.

Formulations for different gamer types – In esports product development, the stack for gaming is unique to each type of player, similar to how sports nutrition stacks are formulated to specific types of athletes. For example, gamers requiring quick reaction times for battle royale games may benefit from a formula that can provide lasting energy without jitters, as well as acute focus.

For games like Grand Theft Auto V or Red Dead Redemption, which can automatically aim for the player, reaction time is typically less of a driving factor in the stack and gamers are likely playing for personal entertainment or streaming, so something with really intense focus is not necessarily needed.

Outlook and opportunities

Looking ahead at product development, formulation and innovation in the esports space, a few interesting areas stand out with the potential for continued growth and new opportunities.

Mood enhancement – Gaming is about escape and fun, and esports supplement formulation for mood enhancement can be further explored. Including ingredients like 5-HTP may provide mood-boosting effects by boosting serotonin, while also targeting important mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Altern Med Rev. 1998;3[4]:271-280).



Hydration – To help keep gamers hydrated over long periods of gaming, electrolytes and other hydrating ingredients like coconut water or Himalayan pink salt could be great additions in esports formulations.

Sublinguals – Powders that can be taken directly on the tongue, or small-dose sublingual tablets than can be dissolved like mints (enabling multiples to be taken over one gaming session) could be a great area for growth in the esports supplements space.

Sleep support – For gamers who may be experiencing insomnia and sleep issues, formulating with ingredients that help with sleep and relaxation would be a great value add.

For brands in the esports supplements space, the opportunities for future expansion are limitless, but knowing one's target audience is huge. When developing esports products to gain unique positioning in this rapidly growing space, a brand needs to consider:



- Who is our ideal gamer?
- What does their schedule look like?
- What is their issue and how will we solve it?

Finally, given the attractive benefits addressed in esports supplements—such as sustained energy, mental clarity and cognitive support—great opportunity also exists for esports brands to consider expanding their product lines for a broader consumer audience outside of gaming. ✦



Jenna DeShayes is a sales executive at [Lief Labs](#), working with and formulating for a book of business ranging from general health and wellness to more niche categories, such as esports and oral health. Coming from a background in media studies and English, DeShayes also contributes to Lief's Beyond the Supps Podcast and teaches Lief University classes to educate team members on various industry and internal topics.



Meg Ligot is the senior product development manager at Lief Labs and [Lief Raws](#), and she oversees the company's R&D department. With a background in biochemistry, Ligot contributes to sales and marketing by overseeing the entire development process from concept ideation to execution. Based in Valencia, California, Lief Labs is a premier formulation and product development innovator and manufacturer of dietary supplements. everyday choice for consumers and we believe it will continue to be relevant in the nutraceutical space for a long time to come.



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