ASCI

A PILL FOR THOUGHT

ASCI Review of Health and Wellness Claims in Nutraceutical Advertising

July - September 2026

INTRODUCTION

The Indian nutraceuticals market was valued at USD 38.77 billion in 2025 and is projected to reach USD 84.99 billion by 2033, growing at a 10.3% CAGR from 2026 to 2033, according to Grand View Research.* Growth is driven by rising health consciousness, demand for nutrition, and a greater focus on preventive healthcare.

Nutraceuticals span functional foods and beverages and dietary supplements such as probiotics, fortified drinks, vitamins and minerals. Positioned at the intersection of food and pharmaceuticals, they offer health benefits beyond basic nutrition.

As the category expands, advertising plays a critical role in shaping consumer understanding and expectations. ASCI undertook a focused investigation into the sector to understand claims and representations made, and their compliance with the ASCI Code that requires ads to be truthful and transparent. Here is what we found:

61	100%	29	31	1
Ads Reviewed	**Ads evaluated required some modification** Base: 60 Ads	**Modified or Withdrawn by Advertiser Without Contest**	**Contested and found in violation of the ASCI Code**	**Under process**

Base: Nutraceutical ads examined during the period July-September 2026

*https://www.grandviewresearch.com/industry-analysis/india-nutraceuticals-market-report

ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

A sweep investigation was undertaken for **61 ads** that promoted health claims for nutraceutical products. Weight management emerged as a prominent theme, followed by skincare and anti-ageing claims, respiratory health, and claims that edged into the treatment of specific diseases. **None of the advertisers who contested the complaints were able to provide adequate evidence to substantiate the promises made in their advertisements.**

SELLING SLIMNESS, ONE DEADLINE AT A TIME

"Lose 6 kgs in 60 days" and "Your thigh fat will be gone in 12 weeks" are examples of how weight-loss advertising translated consumer aspirations into time-bound promises, coupled with before-after visuals of oversized jeans and shrinking silhouettes to suggest that products could deliver dramatic results and even resolve obesity itself.

The findings also reveal growing overlaps between dietary supplements and prescription therapies for chronic weight management and Type 2 diabetes. Some supplements and gummies positioned themselves as safer alternatives, claiming to aid weight loss, burn fat, curb cravings, boost metabolism and control post-meal blood sugar spikes.

Before-and-after visuals reinforced promises of rapid, dramatic fat loss, making results appear predictable and achievable. Such representations risk misleading consumers when the evidence does not support the implied outcomes.

Ingredient-level research was often used to substantiate product-level claims, without robust evidence that the finished formulation delivered the advertised results. Such evidence does not establish the product's efficacy or substantiate the extent of weight loss promised.

Combined with firm timelines, dramatic visuals and claims of being safer alternatives to established therapies, these representations can create unrealistic expectations about the speed, extent and safety of the promised outcomes, potentially misleading consumers about the product's actual capabilities.

BEAUTY FROM WITHIN, OR SKIN-LIGHTENING?

Supplements are increasingly being marketed as solutions for anti-ageing, pigmentation and skin protection from UV damage. Claims such as ***"It helps you to reverse the signs of ageing", "Your skin, but 7 years younger" and "300% stronger skin defence against UV damage"*** promise measurable improvements in skin appearance and function, making substantiation particularly important.

Visuals often **amplified claims of rapid, visible results,** using before-after comparisons, implying a substantial reduction in pigmentation within four weeks. Such time-bound promises require robust, product-specific substantiation.

Other ads linked **novel consumption methods for superior efficacy.** One antioxidant, tocopherol and Omega-3 spray claimed that three under-the-tongue sprays enabled three times faster absorption and helped reverse wrinkles, fine lines and skin laxity, raising questions about substantiation of both the mechanism and promised results.

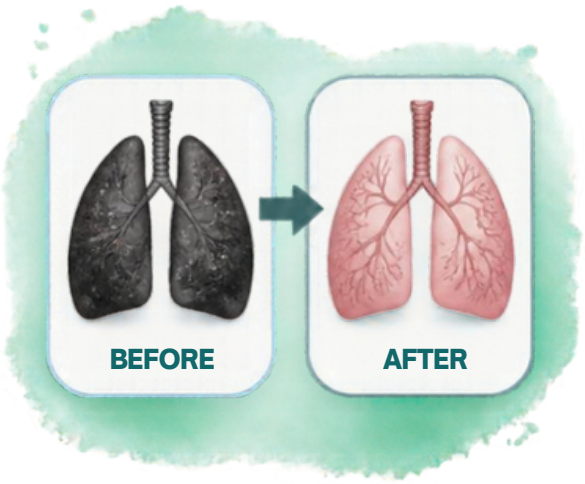
Glutathione ads linked sun protection and de-tanning claims with visuals of darker skin becoming lighter, implying skin lightening beyond tan removal. Such portrayals risk overstating benefits and reinforcing the problematic preference for lighter skin.

Together, these examples underscore the need to assess both the scientific substantiation of claims and the overall impression created by the interplay of words, visuals and promised outcomes.

FROM "LUNG CLEANSING" TO PROMISES OF REVERSING DAMAGE

Another area of concern was advertisements of supplements claiming to "cleanse" lungs, remove toxins and clear tar from smokers' lungs. Brands positioned themselves as solutions for respiratory conditions such as asthma and COPD, sometimes implying they could reverse the effects of pollution and smoking.

Visuals reinforced these claims through before-and-after images of lungs transforming from black to pink, making complex health outcomes appear simple and achievable. Without robust substantiation, such representations risk overstating a supplement's capabilities and misleading consumers into believing it can deliver therapeutic benefits, particularly those seeking relief from respiratory conditions.



HEALTH CLAIMS EDGING INTO DISEASE CURE

The boundaries of health and wellness advertising become more blurred when products begin making claims around specific diseases and clinical outcomes. Claims ranged from easing, supporting, reversing conditions like asthma, COPD, blood pressure and cholesterol and PCOS.

For instance, a wellness product was promoted as being able to "reverse PCOD," positioning the product as capable of addressing a specific medical condition rather than merely supporting general health or nutritional wellness.

Such disease-related claims can imply therapeutic efficacy, leading consumers to overestimate a product's ability to prevent or treat serious conditions and potentially influencing decisions about appropriate medical care.

THE GAP BETWEEN PROMISE AND PROOF

What the cases reveal

Consumers turn to supplements in good faith, often seeking support for concerns such as weight management, blood sugar, skin or hair. When bold claims are not backed by robust evidence, advertising can create unrealistic expectations and mislead consumers at a point when they are making decisions about their health and wellbeing. This creates a serious risk to consumer wellbeing and can ultimately erode trust not just in individual products, but in the category as a whole.

INGREDIENT EVIDENCE DOES NOT EQUAL FULL- PRODUCT EVIDENCE

A recurring issue in contested complaints was the use of ingredient-level research to substantiate finished-product claims. Even where a key ingredient in a product is well researched for a particular benefit, this does not automatically establish that the finished formulation delivers the same benefit. Claims on full product need evidence demonstrating efficacy of the product as marketed.

The strength of the claim must match the evidence. Significant health claims require robust, product and dose specific substantiation.

WHERE CLAIMS OUTRUN EVIDENCE

Across the cases reviewed, the additional three patterns repeatedly emerged:

Claims without adequate proof: In upheld cases, advertisers failed to provide adequate clinical evidence or independent test reports demonstrating that the finished product could deliver the advertised benefits. Evidence must establish the efficacy of the product as advertised.

Superiority without a benchmark: Terms such as "faster", "more effective" and "first" implied a comparative advantage, but the basis of comparison was not always clear or substantiated. A superiority claim must establish not just what is better, but compared with what—and demonstrate that the advantage is real.

Promises ahead of proof: Advertised benefits were sometimes communicated without adequate substantiation in place. When challenged by ASCI, advertisers often chose to withdraw or modify their advertisements rather than provide evidence to support the claims. This highlights a fundamental gap: substantiation should precede the promise, not follow a complaint.

In this category, the stakes are higher. Consumers may act on advertising claims when deciding whether to use a product to prevent, manage or address concerns that directly affect their health and wellbeing. For brands, therefore, **evidence is not simply a compliance requirement, it is the foundation of consumer trust.**

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