

► comprising the main product, perhaps water and possibly a natural binder to keep product stable. Generally, if your vitamins include ingredients that you can't pronounce or with names that look like chemicals, then they might not be as natural as they first seem."

Ponan says cacao is a good choice as it contains high levels of flavonoids and magnesium, while Hawaiian spirulina, she says, is the oldest and one of the most complete foods, boasting an array of minerals such as calcium, iron and magnesium.

She added: "Maca powder is known for that energy kick, libido and mood balance. Maca is naturally rich in vitamins B, C and E and also provides plenty of calcium, zinc, iron, magnesium, phosphorous and amino acids."

Carey added: "My top superfoods are those that not only are super-rich in health-promoting nutrients, but are backed by a wealth of scientific research to demonstrate their purported benefits and efficacy. Here at CherryActive, we have invested tens of thousands of pounds in researching how and why our products, CherryActive, BlueberryActive and BeetActive, bring health and sport benefits to our customers."

Linton pinpointed its best sellers as wheatgrass powder, bee pollen, spirulina, goji berries and cacao products, while Binks highlighted barley grass.

"Easy to take and absorb with a good mix of nutrients, there are many case studies of how it has benefited people," she said.

Seaweed is also considered a superfood thanks to its high nutritional content. Simon Ranger, from Seagreens, explained that seaweed grows only in the ocean, which gives them their distinct properties. Certain species have a broader range of

nutrients than others, with wild wrack being the form chosen by Seagreens, which it harvests in the Scottish Outer Hebrides. "This particular family of the cold water 'brown' seaweeds provide in themselves an outstanding balance of virtually all the nutrients," Ranger said. "It includes an unusual range of micro nutrients like all the B vitamins, trace minerals and complex macronutrients as well as the antioxidants, the same form as wheat germ and a full complement of proteins."

Goodyear is an advocate of coconut oil. "Coconut oil is my number one superfood, but it is often forgotten about in many superfood features or frowned upon because of its high fat content," she said. "People are scared by this, however, coconut oil is packed full of the good fats your body needs. The medium chain fatty acids in coconut oil are digested easier than the fats in say butter or eggs and when ingested at surplus requirement are not stored but sent directly to the liver to be converted to energy. This raises the metabolism which will contribute to weight loss.

"Coconut oil is also used by the body to make hormone substances which control blood pressure, and aids absorption of several different nutrients. It is also anti-fungal, anti-inflammatory and antibacterial."

Laura Stewart, from Teapigs, suggested matcha as a superfood.

"Teapigs top super food has to be matcha, a super-power organic green tea ground to a fine powder, which can be added to cold juice or drunk as a hot tea. Because of the way matcha is shade-grown and the whole leaf is consumed, it has 20 times the number of antioxidants of orange juice and is packed full of essential vitamins and minerals. It also

helps boost the metabolism and can raise energy for up to six hours.

"Until recently, virtually all matcha has been consumed within Japan, where it's traditional for Buddhist monks to drink it before meditation. Since teapigs bought matcha to the UK in 2008, it has gained popularity and can be found in cafés, health food shops and smoothie bars."

Broccoli is often classed as a superfood as it contains a good source of vitamin C and carotenes, while Goodyear highlighted tomatoes for their vitamin C and lycopene content.

She added: "Green and white tea contains phytonutrients, catechins, which help protect the skin and prevent sunburn, and polyphenols, which may help prevent and even reverse age spots and pigmentation on the skin."

Mayuzumi believes mushrooms are true superfoods.

"Red reishi is a herbal mushroom used for thousands of years in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and revered as the 'plant of immortality'. Red reishi is classified as a powerful adaptogen, a herb that can help reduce the effects of stress. Most people take it today to support their immune and cardiovascular health."

Roswess pointed to moringa leaf powder and seeds, which are its biggest seller.

"The reasons for this are it's natural, has no known side effects and over 90 nutrients.

Hunt highlighted African baobab and moringa.

"They are significantly more nutrient-dense than other similar products. Unlike most other 'superfoods' they actually taste quite nice and they are sustainably produced and contribute to sustaining the livelihoods of rural smallholder farmers. hfb

INNOVATION AHEAD?

With so many products on the market claiming to be a superfood, what lies ahead in terms of developing the market? And is there a danger of the sector becoming saturated?

"With the fantastic growth we have seen in the past few years with superfoods, I think the growth will continue, although it may branch out into new formats and with the wonders of incredible herbs and plants there are still many undiscovered powerful superfood ingredients yet to hit the shelves," Heron predicted.

Goodyear added: "Fads will come and go, but I think we will see superfood

blends advance as research shows groundbreaking results against infection, disease and of course bioavailability and nutritional superiority."

Perrin added: "It is inevitable that there will be growing demand for superfoods as people realise that living longer also means they need to live more healthily, to minimise the downside of ageing. On the other hand, fake superfoods will be an increasing problem as unscrupulous producers try to cash in, thus the need for regulation and identification of genuine superfoods."

Hunt also sees the rise continuing: "I don't see the growth slowing down. The

developing world is full of extraordinary natural products with remarkable properties and wonderful stories, the best of which will continue to find their way to the market (despite the EU's best efforts to keep them out). At the same time, developed world brands like ours will continue to use them as ingredients for innovative added-value health food products. Ultimately, we will see them in supermarkets and as added-value ingredients for mainstream snacks. Snickers bar 'with added baobab' is only a matter of time," he said.

Elsbeth Stewart believes product innovation will continue.

"There will always be new

discoveries around the nutritional or health benefits of both novel exotic foods and foods which we've had in the diet for many years. My desire is that there will be less focus around 'the next big super food', fad and more emphasis on enjoying the health benefits that a whole range of plant based foods (super or otherwise) can bring to health."

Linton believes superfoods will cater more to the convenience culture.

"I think companies will start to develop products which will include superfoods into people's everyday diets, superfood convenience drinks and snacks, in a few years," he said.