

Onnit Alpha Brain – Overrated Cognitive Booster for Beginners?

written by Mike Roberto | June 24, 2017



Onnit is one of the most recognized brands in fitness, due to its growth among the CrossFit, Paleo, and holistic fitness crowds, and sponsorship from some heavy hitters like Joe Rogan, Gary Vaynerchuk, Bode Miller, NHL star Jonathan Toews, and more. The brand has launched numerous products to optimize human health and function over the years, but today, we're zeroing in on one of their most well-known products touted to improve your mental gains.

Alpha Brain is the brand's incredibly popular nootropic and brain health formula designed to enhance all aspects of memory, cognition, and mental performance.

Unfortunately, this product has a proprietary blend, but we still do our best to see if it's worth buying by "re-building" it with off-the-shelf ingredients. **Conclusion? For the same price, we can put together a "Homemade Alpha Brain" with off-the-shelf ingredients that's both stronger and provides more total servings.**

Before we get to the breakdown, take a moment to check the best deal and sign up for alerts from PricePLOW:

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Alpha Brain Ingredients

When looking at the Alpha Brain supplement facts panel, it has all the makings of a great brain-boosting formula, until you realize they're all hidden in prop blends and appear to be quite underdosed...

Note: the following doses are for **two capsules** of Alpha Brain:

- Onnit Flow Blend (650mg)
 - L-Tyrosine

Supplement Facts

Serving Size 2 Capsules
Servings Per Container 45 or 15

	Amount Per Serving	%DV
Vitamin B6 (as Pyridoxine HCl)	10 mg	500%
Onnit® Flow Blend L-Tyrosine, L-Theanine, Oat (straw) Extract, Phosphatidylserine	650 mg	*
Cat's Claw (bark) Extract (ac-11®)	350 mg	*
Onnit® Focus Blend L-Alpha glycerylphosphorylcholine (GPC), Bacopa (aerial parts) Extract, <i>Huperzia serrata</i> (aerial parts) Extract	240 mg	*
Onnit® Fuel Blend L-Leucine, Vinpocetine, Pterostilbene	65 mg	*

*Daily Value (DV) Not Established.

Other Ingredients: Vegetarian Capsule (Cellulose, Water), Silica

Alpha Brain is a massive prop blend of ingredients, most of which are underdosed.

We've discussed Tyrosine an awful lot recently, and while it's encouraging to see Onnit include the superior form of Tyrosine in Alpha Brain, the dose included in a single serving is nowhere near the generally recommended 1-2g serving to see maximal effect for improved focus.

- **L-Theanine**

Theanine is the "chiller" amino acid found predominantly in tea leaves. It's commonly added to nootropic formulas for its ability to enhance the cognitive effects of caffeine (which isn't present here)! [1]

The amino acid is also frequently found in pre workouts and sleep formulas due for its calming qualities, which can either help lull you to sleep, or take some of the harsh "kick" out of a pre workout. [2]

However, without any caffeine to assist here, the cognitive benefits here are as unknown as the dosage in Alpha Brain.

- **Oat Straw**

Oat Straw (Avena Sativa) has been extensively studied as a possible cognitive booster and fatigue fighter. Research has shown that Oat Straw can alleviate neurological stress and reduce exhaustion, which are known to impair cognitive performance. [3]

However, studies show you need between 800–2500mg for humans [3,4], which is nowhere near what you're getting here.

- **Phosphatidylserine**



Phosphatidylserine (PS) is a fat-soluble amino acid found in the brain known to support cognitive function. Research has shown that PS can improve declining mental function as well as depression in the elderly. [5,6]

Other PS research notes it can combat anxiety, and cortisol, and possibly elevate post-exercise testosterone levels.[7,8,9]

Typically you want to get 100mg three times a day with PS – this is quite unlikely to hit that does, although it's possible if everything above is around 100mg. Given the price of this ingredient, we doubt it.

- **Cat's Claw (350mg)**

The only nootropic that is fully disclosed, is probably one that's not very familiar to many of you out there. Cat's Claw (*Uncaria tomentosa*) is a woody vine native to South and Central America, and prevalent throughout the Amazon rainforest. Traditionally, the plant has been used for its healing properties to treat a number of conditions including arthritis, dysentery, inflammation, and fever.



Alpha Brain in hand you *might* be on the road to better brain function...

More importantly though, Cat's Claw has also been documented to have several important benefits for preserving and protecting brain function. Studies note that Cat's Claw increases Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF), reduces NMDA activity, and repairs damaged DNA, which supports learning and memory as well as offers some neuroprotective qualities too![10,11]

- **Onnit Focus Blend (240mg)**

- **Alpha GPC**

Alpha GPC is one of the premier forms of Choline, along with CDP-Choline,

that's frequently found in nootropic formulas due to its ability to increase levels of acetylcholine, the learning neurotransmitter.[12]

Typically, we like to see at least 300mg Alpha GPC to really notice it's focus and cognitive-boosting effects, which you're clearly not getting here. There's also no other choline supplements inside to make up for that low dosage. Nevermind the fact that the grade of Alpha GPC isn't listed either. It could be Alpha GPC 50%, meaning you're getting half of what should be listed on the label, or it could be a full Alpha GPC. We just don't know.

Note: The "strength" or grade of Alpha GPC is not disclosed. Contact the manufacturer if concerned, and we will update this post if there is clarification.

- **Bacopa Monnieri**

Bacopa is an adaptogenic and nootropic herb typically used for its ability to improve the body's processing and response to stressful situations. It also boosts mood, relieves anxiety, and improves cognitive function.[13,14]

- **Huperzine**



Onnit offers a full line of products to enhance all aspects of life and fitness.

To further enhance your body's production of acetylcholine, Alpha Brain includes Huperzine A, an acetylcholine "extender." Huperzine is a natural acetylcholinesterase inhibitor – acetylcholinesterase is the enzyme that degrades acetylcholine in the body.[15]

Huperzine will help you get more out of the lower Alpha GPC dose that we

described above, so it's inclusion is welcomed (and necessary) in Alpha Brain.

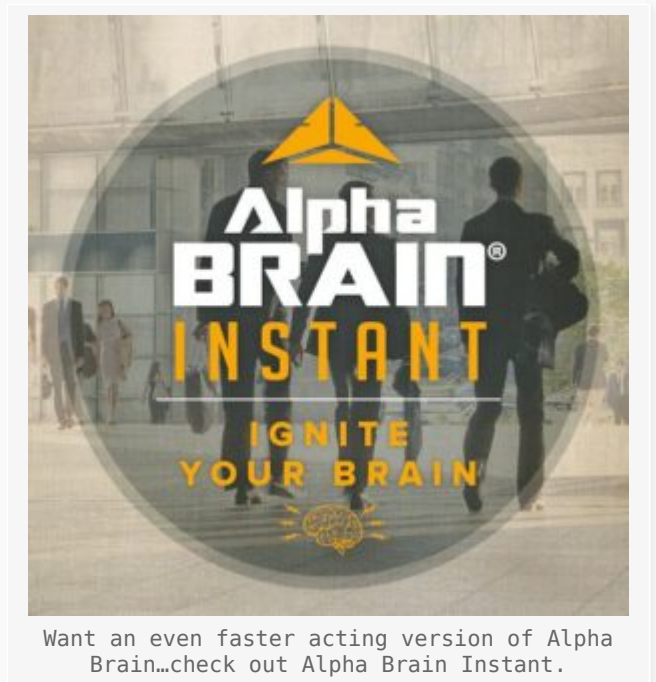
- **Onnit Fuel Blend (65mg)**

- **L-Leucine**

The “king” of the amino acids, leucine is primarily known for its role in stimulating muscle protein synthesis (MPS) via activation of the mTOR pathway in the body. That's not why it's included here though.

Leucine enters the brain more rapidly than any other amino acid and used by the brain to form glutamate and glutamine, the excitatory neurotransmitters in the brain, as well as handle nitrogen metabolism in the brain, thereby preserving brain function.[16,17]

- **Vinpocetine**



Vinpocetine is found in the common Periwinkle plant, and is one of the more familiar nootropics you'll encounter among brain-boosting supplements. This extract ramps up cerebral blood flow, which has been implicated to enhance both long term and short term memory.[18,19,20] Greater blood flow means more nutrients are delivered to the brain which increases awareness, reaction speed, and focus.

- **Pterostilbene**

Pterostilbene is a naturally-occurring antioxidant abundantly found in blueberries. This intriguing compounds helps combat oxidative stress by

fighting free radicals in the body, which can lead to inflammation. Furthermore, research has shown that the compound has been associated with neuroprotective effects and prevent cognitive decline.[21]

Dosing

Onnit gives two suggestions for dosing Alpha Brain:

For enhanced mental performance: Consume 2 capsules in the morning or early afternoon, preferably with a meal.

For “enhanced dream state”: Consume 2 capsules 4-6 hours prior to sleep.

Onnit advises to not consume more than 3 capsules in any 24 hour period.

The Value Proposition: Is this worth it?

Let’s be honest here. At one or even two capsules, this is not a very strong nootropic supplement.

So let’s see how much it’d cost to put together Alpha Brain using *off-the-shelf* ingredients!

First off, at the time of writing, with PricePlow you can get 90 capsules (45 *servings*) for **\$66.31**. That’s our target to meet or beat.

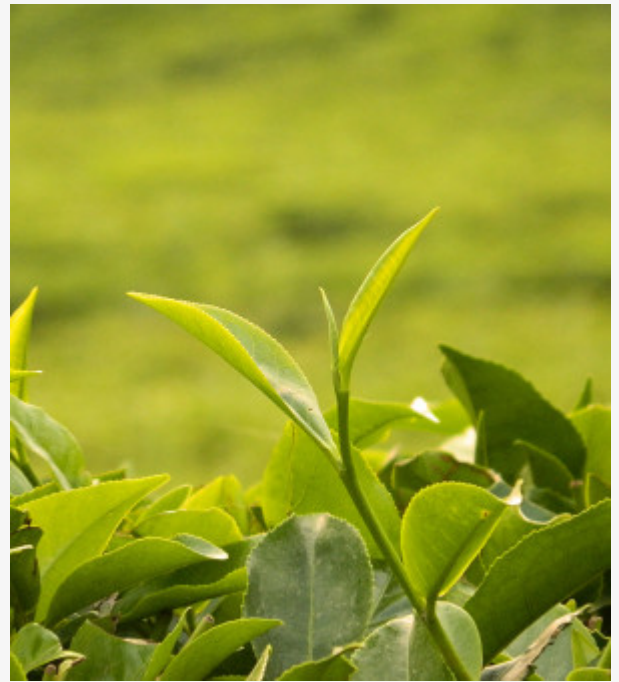
*There’s a convenience factor to taking two Alpha Brain’s and being done with it, but the point here is that this is a **starter nootropic**. Nothing more.*

Building our own Alpha Brain

Next, we need to do our best to guess what these proprietary blends consist of. This is where the most error will be introduced, so feel free to chime in on the comments below – we’re sure it’ll be close enough for value estimations though:

- **ONNIT Flow Blend** – 650mg needed:
 - L-Tyrosine: estimated 500mg
Amount to buy = 22.5g
 - L-Theanine: estimated 75mg
Amount to buy = 3.375g
 - Oat Straw: estimated 50mg
Amount to buy = 2.25g

- Phosphatidylserine: estimated 25mg
Amount to buy = 1.125g



L-Theanine comes from tea leaves, and may pair well with Modafinil to offset any potential anxiety.

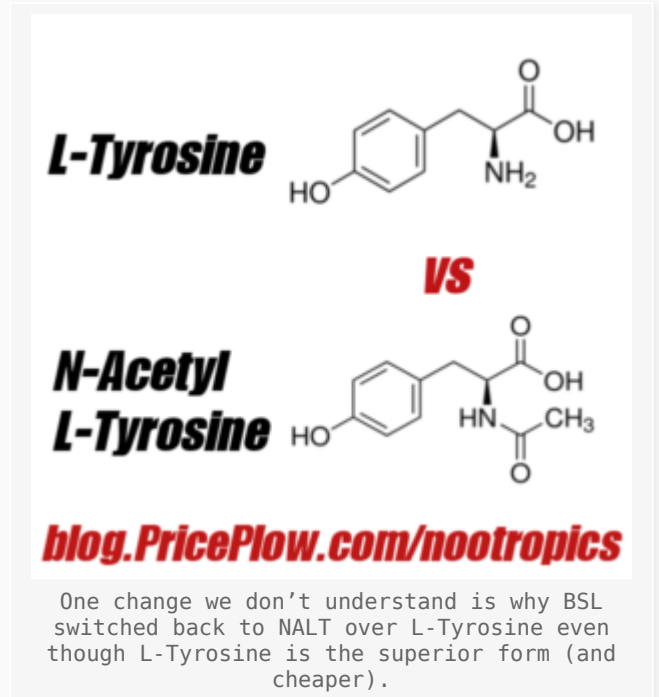
We could be way off with this blend, but L-Theanine is the biggest clue. Too much of it could make you a touch too relaxed, and since it's a very expensive raw material, most proprietary blenders looking to score profits aren't going to dose it too high. Plus, 500mg is a pretty standard L-Tyrosine dose that you start to feel.

- Cat's Claw: known 350mg
Amount to buy = 15.75g
- **ONNIT Focus Blend** – 240mg needed
 - Alpha GPC: estimated 150mg
Amount to buy = 6.75g
 - Bacopa Monnieri: estimated 89.9mg
Amount to buy = 4.0455g
 - Huperzine A: estimated 100mcg (*micrograms*)
Amount to buy = 4,500mcg

The *amount to buy* areas were calculated by multiplying the dose by 45, since there's 45 servings per container. Now let's find some off-the-shelf ingredients (all prices are as of June 23, 2017 using PricePlow):

- **ONNIT Flow Blend:**

- L-Tyrosine: *Amount needed* = 22.5g



We can buy 60 500mg capsules of NOW L-Tyrosine for just **\$3.95**.

- L-Theanine: *Amount needed* = 3.375g

We can buy 60 100mg capsules of Jarrow Formulas L-Theanine for **\$7.49**.

- Oat Straw: *Amount needed* = 2.25g

We can buy 60 capsules of Swanson Avena Sativa for **\$5.73**.

- Phosphatidylserine: *Amount needed* = 1.125g

We can buy 50 100mg softgels of Jarrow Formulas PS100 for **\$10.18**.

This one might be a bit of a stretch since it'd hold back our total number of doses, so you can also get 60 100mg softgels for **\$13.42**.

- Cat's Claw: *Amount to buy* = 15.75g

You can get 60 334mg capsules of NOW Cat's Claw Extract for **\$5.95**.

- **ONNIT Focus Blend**

- Alpha GPC: *Amount needed* = 6.75g

You can buy 60 300mg capsules of NOW Alpha-GPC for **\$16.19**.

- Bacopa Monnieri: *Amount needed = 4.0455g*

You can buy 60 445mg capsules of Solaray Bacopa for **\$6.79**.

- Huperzine A: *Amount needed = 4,500mcg*

You can buy 120 100mcg capsules of SNS Huperzine A 99% for **\$7.19**. That's a temporary sale going on right now though, so also consider 60 100mcg tablets of Source Naturals Huperzine A for **\$7.17**.

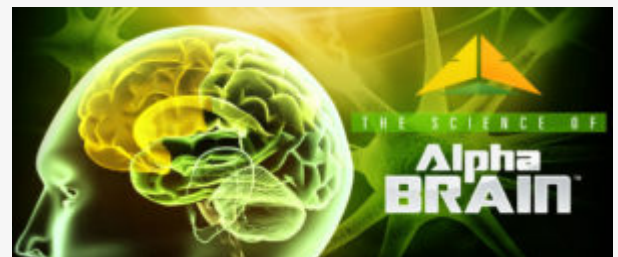
Grand total = \$66.69 (if choosing the 60 PS100 softgels) – nearly *exactly* the same price as ONNIT's Alpha Brain.

You may have also noticed two important things:

1. We're getting a hell of a lot higher doses of everything
2. We're getting far more servings total

You'd literally have to spend *\$130* with ONNIT to compete with the package we put together above.

So is Alpha Brain worth it?



Is Alpha Brain worth it? Maybe for a once off

There's a convenience factor to taking two Alpha Brain's and being done with it, but the point here is that this is a *starter nootropic*. Nothing more.

Once you realize that you love those 300mg Alpha GPC tablets (which are easily the most expensive thing in our "homemade Alpha Brain"), you won't want to go back to whatever pixie-dusted dosage ONNIT put in.

Given that we can buy more and better-dosed *off-the-shelf* ingredients for the same price as Alpha Brain, we have to believe that Onnit is spending too much money paying guys like Joe Rogan (as much as we love him) and not enough offering value to their consumers.

It's good to try once, but if you realize you're into these focus enhancers – known as *nootropics* – it's time to start looking elsewhere or build your own with actual efficacious doses.

Takeaway

Alpha Brain could simply be better. Yes, it contains ingredients to preserve, enhance, and prolong brain activity. But due to the fact that nearly the entire product is composed of proprietary blends, and most of it appears to be severely underdosed, we are extremely skeptical and a bit down on this popular product for anyone who's really into this stuff.

It's a lot to ask someone to spend \$66 when you could probably just buy the Alpha-GPC and L-Tyrosine bottles up above for a *third* of the price and do just as well, if not better due to *real* dosing.

However, if you're new to this kind of thing, go ahead and spend the money. And when you realize that you like the effects but need more capsules to really feel it, you can always come on back to this page and start tinkering on your own.

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