

VITAMINS

Vitamin D

It helps keep your bones strong. People who have healthy levels of it may be less likely to get certain conditions, but more research is needed. Your body makes vitamin D when you're in sunshine. It's also in salmon, tuna, and fortified foods. If you're low on vitamin D, your doctor may suggest a supplement. But several large studies show no benefits to otherwise healthy adults. And taking too much is bad for you.



Probiotics

Also called "good" bacteria, probiotics are found in fermented foods like yogurt, kombucha, miso, and sauerkraut. They can change the balance of good and bad bacteria in your body and may help improve digestion, soothe skin irritation, lower cholesterol, support your immune system, and more. But it's not yet clear if probiotics in supplements help treat conditions, and most people don't need to take them every day.

Multivitamins

If you know your diet isn't that healthy, can a multivitamin help you fill in the nutritional gaps? Not necessarily. Many studies have found that multivitamins don't fight memory loss, heart disease, or cancer. Meanwhile, getting too many nutrients in pill form can cause harm. Experts usually recommend food as the best source for vitamins and minerals.

Folic Acid

Here's a vitamin you want to make sure you have enough of if you're a woman who's planning to get pregnant. Getting enough folic acid can help prevent birth defects in a baby's brain and spine. You need 400 micrograms (mcg) per day, and the CDC recommends taking that much in a supplement, along with whatever you get from your diet.

Fibre Supplements

Fibre is in veggies, fruits, whole grains, seeds, nuts, and legumes like beans. It helps cut cholesterol, control blood sugar, and improve digestion. Women under 50 should get 25 grams a day, and men should get 38 grams. But only 5-9% of us hit those numbers. Taking a fibre supplement is usually safe, but ask your doctor, especially if you take medicines like aspirin. Start slowly to avoid gas and bloating and be sure to get enough water.

Fish Oil

Fish like salmon and sardines have healthy fats called omega-3s that can lower your risk of heart disease. If you don't eat fish, there are fish oil supplements with omega-3s, like EPA and DHA, and there are algae-based supplements. But more research is needed, because omega-3s in pills may work differently than the ones in fish. If you take a pill, the FDA says to keep the dosage to less than 2 grams per day of EPA and DHA combined.

Calcium

Unless your doctor recommends it, you probably don't need a calcium supplement. Some research has linked them to a greater risk of heart disease and prostate cancer, but that link isn't clear. You can strengthen your bones with exercise like walking, tennis, dancing, and lifting weights. And fill your plate with calcium-rich foods like yogurt, almonds, dark leafy greens (for vitamin K), and fish or fortified foods for vitamin D.

Joint Supplements

Glucosamine and chondroitin, two types of arthritis supplements, are among the most popular supplements sold in the U.S. They are found naturally in human cartilage. Research on whether they can ease arthritis pain or prevent arthritis is mixed. Still, most experts say there's no harm in trying them, in case you're one of the people who gets relief from them. As with all supplements, it's best to check with your doctor first.

Vitamin C

Your body can't make vitamin C, so you must get it from food. And it's easy to hit the recommended daily amount. Just 3/4 cup of orange or half a cup red bell pepper both provide more than 150% of what you need. So you probably don't need a supplement. There are popular products on the market with mega-doses of vitamin C that claim to prevent colds (or at least shorten how long they last), but research on that has been inconclusive.

Magnesium

This mineral supports your body in lots of ways. It gives you energy and keeps your heart healthy, for example. But even though it's found in a range of foods, including nuts, seeds, whole grains, and leafy greens, most Americans don't get enough. If you're interested in taking a magnesium supplement, ask your doctor which type is best. There are several options.

Turmeric

This yellow-orange spice may help tame inflammation, which is part of a wide variety of conditions. It's not yet clear if turmeric thwarts any health problems. As a supplement, it's sometimes labelled as curcumin, which is one of the active ingredients in turmeric that has been the focus of scientific studies. Up to 8 grams per day is considered safe. And it's fine to add the spice to your foods.

Vitamin B12

You need it to make red blood cells and DNA and to keep your nervous system healthy. It's found in animal products like fish, meat, eggs, and milk, so vegetarians and vegans may come up short, as can adults over the age of 50 and people with digestive problems like Crohn's disease. B12 supplements are sold as pills or shots. B12 shots have become trendy to try to boost energy and slim down, though no research shows they work.

Keep in Mind

Everyone is different. If you have a specific health concern that you think supplements might help with, ask your doctor. Your doctor can check to see what's safe for you, tell you about potential side effects, and add your supplements to your health record. The FDA doesn't approve supplements, unlike prescription drugs. So do your research and talk with your doctor first.