

Take Vitamin, Mineral, and/or Herbal Supplements Wisely

The term “dietary supplement” can be used for anything taken orally to enhance your usual food intake. Dietary supplements include vitamins, minerals, amino acids, and herbal products. People take supplements because they are not sure they get enough nutrients in the foods they eat and/or they want to treat or prevent an illness.

General Guidelines

1. Healthy children and adults can get the nutrients they need by choosing a variety of foods in moderation rather than taking supplements. This reduces the risk of deficiencies, as well as excesses.
2. Some supplement ingredients can be seriously harmful. Examples include high potency doses of some vitamins, such as niacin, amino acids (e.g., L-tryptophan) and herbs (e.g., chaparral, comfrey, and germander).
3. A standard multi-vitamin-and-mineral supplement can't hurt and might help, if a person doesn't eat healthy foods or is on a low calorie diet.
4. Do not take supplements, though, that contain more than 10 times the Recommended Daily Intake (RDI) for a nutrient, especially for fat soluble vitamins (A, D, E, K). The mineral selenium can also be harmful if taken in large amounts.
5. The value of vitamins is in food rather than pills. It's much better to get your vitamins and minerals from food than from pills. Unlike supplements, fruits, vegetables, and whole grains have dietary fiber that is beneficial, promotes regularity, and aids in the prevention of disease.



Food contains beneficial elements that cannot be packaged in a pill.

6. Some people need a vitamin - mineral supplement to meet specific nutrient needs. Here are examples:
 - Females with excessive menstrual bleeding may need to take an iron supplement.
 - Females who are pregnant or breast-feeding need more iron, folic acid, and calcium.
 - Some vegetarians may not get enough calcium, iron, zinc, and vitamin B₁₂.
 - Older adults and people with little exposure to sunlight may need a vitamin D supplement.
 - People with certain disorders or diseases and people who take some medications. For example, persons with high blood pressure who take a water pill may need to take a potassium supplement. Ask your doctor if you need any vitamin and/or mineral supplement due to a medical condition or any medicine(s) you take.
 - People who seldom eat dairy products or other rich sources of calcium may need a calcium supplement.

7. *The Bottom Line:* You should eat healthy foods to get needed nutrients. Consult your doctor or registered dietitian about taking vitamin/mineral supplements.



Women may need to supplement their diets with calcium.

Be Informed!

The following Web sites give general information, safe use, and warnings about dietary supplements.

Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
www.fda.gov
Search for Dietary Supplements

Food and Nutrition Information Center
<https://fnic.nal.usda.gov>

National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM)
www.nccam.nih.gov

National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements
ods.od.nih.gov