

Get the Most from Your Supplements

- Don't store your supplements in the refrigerator, bathroom, or other humid environment; store them in a cool, dark place.
- Avoid gimmicky marketing and high-priced supplements; buy U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP) grade supplements when possible. A "USP-Verified" mark on the label ensures quality, purity, and potency of the supplement.
- Fat-soluble vitamins (vitamins A, D, E, and K) should be taken with a meal containing some oil or fat.
- Sun exposure is the primary source of vitamin D, but sunscreen blocks skin synthesis of the vitamin. People in northern latitudes are especially at risk for vitamin D deficiency in the winter. Take vitamin D supplements daily.
- Except for vitamin E and folic acid, there is no difference between natural and synthetic vitamins. Synthetic vitamin E is about 50% natural vitamin E (*d*-alpha-tocopherol). Folic acid, the form of the B vitamin usually used in supplements and food fortification, is more bioavailable than folate, which is found in food. Folic acid is converted to the biologically active form, folate, in the body.
- Drugs can affect micronutrient status. For example, people using proton-pump inhibitor drugs for heartburn may be at increased risk for vitamin B₁₂ deficiency due to decreased stomach acid.
- Take natural-source vitamin E (*RRR*-alpha-tocopherol or *d*-alpha-tocopherol).
- To maximize absorption, take no more than 500 mg of a calcium supplement at one time. The ratio of magnesium to calcium in combined supplements should be about 1:2 or 1:3.
- If you take gram amounts of vitamin C, take them in divided doses daily to maintain consistently high plasma concentrations.
- "Natural" does not always mean "safe."
- If you don't regularly consume fish, consider taking a two-gram fish oil supplement providing the omega-3 fatty acids eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) several times a week. If you are prone to bleeding or take anticoagulant drugs, consult your physician.
- Supplemental "age-essential" micronutrients like acetyl-L-carnitine (500-1,000 mg/day) and alpha-lipoic acid (200-400 mg/day) may help counteract age-related declines in metabolic efficiency, physical activity, and cognitive performance that accompany aging.
- A daily multivitamin/mineral supplement is important for added insurance that micronutrient requirements are met.
- Older people should avoid supplements containing iron or excess vitamin A (more than 2,500 IU).

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