

WHAT'S THE STORY ON SUPPLEMENTS?

You've heard the hype, but are dietary supplements for you?

Health and wellness is a topic that has gained significant mainstream attention in the U.S. throughout the past few decades. Statistics show Americans are becoming increasingly unhealthy, resulting in a much closer focus on diet and what we are actually putting into our bodies. Things such as “superfoods” and dietary supplements have become increasingly popular, yet some research suggests supplements may not be all that beneficial. In fact, certain supplements can even pose serious health risks. With all the hype and contradicting information, it can be difficult to determine what supplements—if any—are right for you.

WHAT ARE SUPPLEMENTS?

Dietary supplements are typically tablet, capsule, or powder-based substances that provide nutrients for your body that you may not otherwise consume enough of in order to meet the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) daily recommended value. Common supplements include vitamins, minerals, fiber, amino acids, enzymes, herbs, and many others.

SHOULD I BE TAKING A SUPPLEMENT?

A healthy and balanced diet should likely provide you with the recommended essential nutrients; however, this is sometimes easier said than done.

According to the USDA, the majority of Americans do not consume sufficient amounts of potassium, dietary fiber, choline, magnesium, calcium, and vitamins A, D, E, and C. Symptoms of vitamin deficiency vary widely, and can include fatigue, weakness, and many other indicators. If you have been experiencing anything unusual, you should consult with your doctor right away. Your doctor will be able to order the necessary lab work to determine if you are actually deficient of any essential nutrients and make the appropriate recommendations.

If you feel that you might be nutrient-deficient, it may also be worthwhile to evaluate your diet using an app such as the USDA's SuperTracker. SuperTracker allows individuals to track their daily food intake as compared by the dietary guidelines put out annually by the USDA. While it may seem cumbersome to track everything you eat, it can help you identify which, if

any, key nutrients are missing from your diet, and whether a supplement—such as a multivitamin—may or may not be beneficial for you.

Please keep in mind that you should always consult with your doctor prior to starting any supplements.

ARE SUPPLEMENTS SAFE?

While, in general, most supplements are safe in the recommended amounts, some supplements do pose certain health risks. According to a study conducted by Harvard Medical School, some research has shown that people in trials who were given supplements of vitamin A, vitamin E, and beta carotene actually were shown to have higher death rates than those who weren't.

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) reports that Vitamin K can reduce the ability of a common blood thinning drug, Coumadin®, to prevent blood from clotting. St. John's Wort has been known to reduce the overall effectiveness of many drugs, including antidepressants and birth control pills. Some antioxidant supplements, such as vitamins C and E,

can even reduce the effectiveness of chemotherapy for certain types of cancer.

It's also important to keep in mind that too much of a supplement can also cause more harm than good. Many nutrients are already found in food, so adding a supplement on top of that can raise your risk of experiencing certain side effects. For example, excess amounts of vitamin A can cause headaches and liver damage, reduce bone strength, and cause birth defects.

If you are pregnant or nursing, you should also be especially cautious about taking dietary supplements and always consult with your doctor.

ARE SUPPLEMENTS EFFECTIVE?

Choosing a certain brand when it comes to supplements is very important. According to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), dietary supplement manufacturers and distributors are not required to obtain FDA approval prior to marketing their products. Manufacturers are responsible for having evidence that their products meet FDA guidelines and standards; however, all claims of safety are really up to the manufacturer.

Certain third-party and independent organizations, such as the US Pharmacopeia (USP), are dedicated to providing quality control standards for the strength, quality, and purity of pharmaceuticals. This organization works directly with the manufacturers to ensure they have proper quality control protocols, and that the claims their products make are valid. Other organizations that offer supplement testing include ConsumerLab.com and NSF International.

ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES?

Yes! Consuming a healthy and balanced diet should provide you with all the

necessary nutrients. The USDA's 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, recommend following a Healthy U.S.-Style, Mediterranean, or Vegetarian Eating Pattern.

The Healthy U.S.-Style Eating Pattern is based on 12 different calorie models, as dietary needs vary based on age, sex, height, weight, and level of physical activity. This eating pattern focuses on recommended daily allowances for vegetables, fruits, grains, dairy, and protein.

The Healthy Mediterranean-Style Eating Pattern contains more fruits and seafood and less dairy compared to the U.S.-Style. Nutrient content of this eating pattern was found to be similar to U.S.-Style, with the exception of less calcium and vitamin D, as dairy foods have higher concentrations of calcium and vitamin D.

The Healthy Vegetarian Eating Pattern restricts meats, poultry, and seafood. Instead, this eating style is rich in legumes (beans and peas), soy products, nuts and seeds, and whole grains. It tends to be higher in calcium and dietary fiber, but lower in vitamin D due to the macronutrient differences between food groups.

Shifting to healthier food and beverage choices should increase your overall level of natural nutrient intake, but this will vary per individual. For more information on these eating styles, refer to www.health.gov/dietaryguidelines.com.

As long as you are safe and smart when it comes to taking dietary supplements, there is typically nothing wrong with adding them to your daily diet. The best way to determine if a supplement is right for you is to talk with your doctor, or a registered dietitian, who can help analyze your nutrient intake more thoroughly and provide the proper advice. ♦

15 MOST POPULAR SUPPLEMENTS OF 2017

ConsumerLab.com conducted a 2017 survey of over 9,500 individuals who take supplements. According to the survey, the top 15 most popular supplements taken are ranked below.

- 1 VITAMIN D
- 2 FISH OIL
- 3 COQ10
- 4 PROBIOTICS
- 5 MULTIVITAMINS
- 6 B VITAMINS
- 7 MAGNESIUM
- 8 CURCUMIN/TURMERIC
- 9 VITAMIN C
- 10 CALCIUM
- 11 MELATONIN
- 12 PROTEIN/NUTRITION POWDERS AND DRINKS
- 13 DIGESTIVE ENZYMES
- 14 JOINT SUPPLEMENTS
- 15 GREEN TEA