

Do you Need a Nutrient Supplement for Healthy Aging?

It is best to eat a wide variety of healthy foods each day. Healthy choices are fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat milk products, and lean meat, poultry, or fish. Sometimes it is hard to eat healthy foods everyday, so supplements can be helpful.



You may need nutrient supplements if you do any of these:

- Eat a low-calorie weight loss diet or are losing weight without wanting to.
- Are eating fewer than two meals per day.
- Do not eat three servings of milk-products daily.
- Have a disease of your digestive track and can't absorb certain nutrients.
- Smoke, because smoking lowers vitamin C levels in the body.
- Drink three or more alcoholic beverages most days.

Tips for choosing and storing dietary supplements:

- Talk with your doctor for advice, tell your doctor what you are taking, and do not self-prescribe.
- Buy from a trusted source, such as a local pharmacy or grocery store.
- Buy common name brands or store brands.
- Avoid buying supplements from the internet.
- Choose supplements with close to 100% of the Daily Value for most nutrients. It is OK to exceed the Daily Value for calcium, vitamin D and vitamin B12, because older people have high needs for these nutrients.
- Check expiration dates and look for the initials "USP," which means the supplement meets certain quality standards.
- Be very cautious with "herbal" supplements. Ask your doctor for advice and tell your doctor what you are taking.
- Stop taking "herbals" before surgery, because many promote bleeding.
- Store supplements in a safe place away from children.

Most older people can benefit from taking these nutrient supplements:

1. Multivitamin/mineral with vitamin D (400 IU) and vitamin B12 (at least 12 mcg). Most multivitamin/mineral supplements have other important nutrients such as vitamin C.
2. Calcium supplements providing 200 mg to 900 mg depending on your intake of dietary calcium. Milk and yogurt have about 300 mg of calcium per cup. Most multivitamin/mineral supplements have very little calcium. The total calcium from diet and supplements should be 1,200 mg daily and should not exceed 2,000 mg daily.
 - ___ If you consume no milk or yogurt, then consider taking supplements to provide about 800 mg to 900 mg of calcium daily.
 - ___ If you consume about one cup of milk or yogurt daily, then consider taking a supplement with 500 mg to 600 mg of calcium.
 - ___ If you consume about two cups of milk or yogurt daily, then consider taking a supplement with 200 mg to 300 mg of calcium daily.
 - ___ If you consume about three cups of milk and/or yogurt daily, then you probably don't need a calcium supplement.
3. Vitamin D supplements of up to 1,000 IU, depending on the intake of vitamin D from other sources. Milk has 100 IU of vitamin D per cup. Most yogurts do not have vitamin D and most other foods have very little vitamin D. The total vitamin D from diet and supplements should be about 1,000 IU daily and should not exceed 4,000 IU daily, unless directed to by your doctor.
 - ___ If you don't drink milk and don't take a multivitamin, then consider taking one tablet with 1,000 IU of vitamin D daily.
 - ___ If you drink no milk and take a multivitamin with 400 IU of vitamin D, then consider taking two tablets with 400 IU of vitamin D daily.
 - ___ If you drink about one or two glasses of milk daily and take a multivitamin with 400 IU of vitamin D, then consider taking one tablet with 400 IU of vitamin D daily.
4. Fish oil supplement if you don't eat at least 8 ounces of fatty fish weekly, such as salmon. 1 to 3 grams of fish oil daily is about right for most people.
5. Vitamin E supplements are controversial. Some, but not all, studies show they help the heart, immunity, memory, and dementia. Taking 200 IU to 400 IU daily is safe for most people and may have health benefits. Choose a vitamin E supplement with "d alpha" on the label, because it is easily used by the body.

