

Supplement Sense

DO I NEED SUPPLEMENTS?

You might consider supplements if:

- you have a known deficiency
- you are pregnant or breastfeeding
- you are older than 50
- you have certain medical conditions
- you have had weight loss surgery
- you have a restrictive diet
- you are highly active



BUYER BEWARE

When it comes to supplements, keep in mind:

- they are poorly regulated
- they can interact with medications
- more is not always better
- most are not proven to work
- they are not a replacement for a health-promoting lifestyle



Examples of Supplement Needs

Pregnant or breastfeeding women:

- Folic Acid: Essential in early pregnancy to prevent neural tube defects
- Iron: Supports increased blood volume and oxygen delivery.
- Calcium and Vitamin D: For bone health and fetal development.
- Omega-3 Fatty Acids (DHA): Supports fetal brain and eye development.

Older adults

- Vitamin D and Calcium: To maintain bone density and prevent osteoporosis.
- Vitamin B12: Absorption decreases with age, which can affect energy and neurological health.
- Magnesium: Supports bone health, blood sugar regulation, and muscle function.

People with digestive disorders

- Vitamin B12 and Folate: Malabsorption issues can lead to deficiencies.
- Iron: Malabsorption and gastrointestinal bleeding can cause iron deficiency.
- Fat-Soluble Vitamins (A, D, E, K): Often poorly absorbed, especially in conditions like Crohn's.
- Probiotics: May help balance gut bacteria and improve digestive health.

Vegetarians or vegans

- Vitamin B12: Found primarily in animal products, essential for nerve function and red blood cell production.
- Iron: Plant-based diets have non-heme iron, which is less easily absorbed.
- Omega-3 Fatty Acids: Particularly EPA and DHA, which are often sourced from fish.
- Vitamin D and Calcium: To maintain bone density and prevent osteoporosis.
- Zinc: For immune function and wound healing.

People on restrictive diets

- Multivitamins: To cover a broad range of potential deficiencies due to limited food variety.
- Protein: May be needed to ensure adequate muscle maintenance.
- Fiber: If the diet is low in whole grains, fruits and vegetables, fiber supplements may help with digestion.

Athletes or people who are highly active

- Electrolytes (e.g., Sodium, Potassium, Magnesium): Lost through sweat and important for muscle function and hydration.
- Protein: Essential for muscle repair and recovery; some may need whey or plant-based protein powders.
- B Vitamins: Involved in energy production, especially important for endurance athletes.

Common Supplement-Medication Interactions

- Calcium and certain antibiotics
- Vitamin K and blood thinners (e.g., Warfarin, Aspirin)
- Iron and thyroid medications
- St. John's Wort and antidepressants, birth control, or antivirals
- Magnesium and blood pressure medications
- Ginkgo Biloba and blood thinners (e.g., Warfarin, Aspirin)
- Potassium and ACE inhibitors or diuretics
- Fish oil and blood-thinning medications
- Melatonin and sedatives (e.g., Benzodiazepines)
- Vitamin E and blood thinners or chemotherapy drugs

Look for the USP Verified Mark



The United States Pharmacopeial Convention (USP) Verified Mark is awarded to manufacturers who go through a stringent application process to ensure the following:

- Contains ingredients listed on the label, in the declared potency and amounts.
- Does not contain harmful levels of specified contaminants.
- Will break down and release into the body within a specified amount of time.
- Has been made according to current FDA Good Manufacturing Practices using sanitary and well-controlled procedures.

Learn More...

[WebMD database for vitamins and supplements](#)

[Dietary Supplement Fact Sheets - National Institutes of Health](#)