



NUTRI-FACTS: SUPPLEMENTS

Supplements are consumable products, such as liquids or tablets, that contain a dietary ingredient intended to supplement the diet.¹ They are not meant to replace healthy eating and physical activity.¹ Nor are they expected to treat a medical condition or cure an illness.¹ However, some individuals who are not able to meet their nutrient needs through food alone may require supplements.²

Health Benefits

Nutrient deficiencies are rare in the United States.² Most individuals are able to meet their vitamin and mineral needs by eating a variety of healthy foods.² There are exceptions. For example, those who are wounded, ill, or injured may need additional zinc and vitamins A and C to promote healing.² Vegetarians and vegans may need to take a vitamin B12 supplement to compensate for the lack of animal products in their diet.² Calcium supplementation may be needed by those who are lactose intolerant or vegan due to dietary restrictions.³ Likewise, calcium supplementation may be needed by growing children to help them with the formation of new bone or the elderly to slow their rate of bone loss.³ If you suspect that you are in need of additional vitamins or minerals beyond what your current diet can provide, consult a health care provider or dietitian before taking a supplement.

Not a Quick Fix

Being underweight, overweight, or in poor physical condition can hurt your career, delay your readiness, and increase your risk of developing a chronic disease. Unfortunately, some believe that taking a supplement might help them reach their goals faster and easier, which is seldom the case nor does it result in a permanent fix. The most effective way to improve performance, gain muscle, or lose body fat is by living a balanced lifestyle consisting of a healthy diet and regular exercise. There are no overnight success stories when it comes to physical performance or weight management. To achieve optimal physical performance or a healthy weight it takes time and commitment where eventually your routine will be a lifestyle that continues to support a healthy and fit body.

Safety Concerns

Unlike prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) does not review and approve supplements prior to being made available to the public.⁴ Manufacturers are entrusted with ensuring that their products are safe and that they are following good manufacturing practices; however, they are not required to disclose the information or evidence that supports their claim.⁴ Once a supplement is on the market, the FDA has the burden of showing that the product is unsafe before it can initiate a product recall.⁴ In other words, instead of preventing illness and injury caused by adulterated supplements, the FDA is tasked with reacting to these health emergencies after they occur. Please take note, supplements that promote benefits in body building, sexual enhancement, weight loss, and diabetes management are considered the highest safety risk categories for potential adulteration or having undeclared ingredients.

Health Concerns

The health concerns associated with supplements are every bit as real as the foods they attempt to replace. Some supplements have been found to cause irregular heartbeat, stroke, headaches, or other unfavorable reactions.⁵ They may increase or decrease the effectiveness of prescription or over-the-counter medications.⁴ Supplements may also lead to positive drug tests because in the absence of FDA regulation there is no official way of knowing if a supplement contains an unidentified controlled substance.⁵



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There is a process for independently evaluating supplements for purity and quality, known as third-party certification.⁵ This is a voluntary process, meaning that manufacturers are not required to certify their products.⁵ Third-party certification is NOT an endorsement of effectiveness, but it does verify that the specific product contains the ingredients listed on the label.⁵ If you are thinking about taking a supplement, check the bottle or packaging for these third-party certifications⁵:

- United States Pharmacopeia (USP)
- NSF International
- Informed-Choice
- Banned Substances Control Group
- ConsumerLab.com

If you are concerned about your physical performance, diet, or your weight, consult a health care professional or dietitian and check out the resources below before you take a supplement.

Resources

- [HPW Healthy Eating](#): Educational resources and materials to help you select nutrient-dense foods to improve your overall health, prevent chronic disease, and enhance performance.
- [HPW Active Living](#): Evidenced-based guidance on how to start a new exercise routine, refresh your current workout regime, or train like a professional athlete.
- [How Safe are Dietary Supplements?](#): A fact sheet that outlines the safety concerns associated with supplement use.
- [How Healthy are Dietary Supplements?](#): A fact sheet that details the potential impact of supplements on your health.

To view the references for the Nutri-Facts series, visit:

[HTTP://WWW.MED.NAVY.MIL/SITES/NMCPHC/HEALTH-PROMOTION/PAGES/NUTRI-FACTS_REFERENCES.ASPX](http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/health-promotion/pages/nutri-facts_references.aspx)

Third-party Certifications



Be Sure It's CL Approved