



DECODING VITAMINS & MINERALS

There are few things more confusing in the pharmacy than the vitamin and mineral section. In an ideal world, all the nutrients our bodies need to function properly should be contained in the foods we eat. Unfortunately, our busy schedules and today's food sources don't often provide the same health benefits that farm fresh foods once did. To help our bodies compensate, it's important to understand the basics about vitamins and minerals.

VITAMINS

Vitamins are organic substances that fall into two categories, fat-soluble and water-soluble.

1. Fat-soluble vitamins dissolve in fat and tend to accumulate in the body. They include vitamins A, D, E and K. While rare, taking too many fat-soluble vitamins can be toxic, so talk to your healthcare provider about these.
2. Water-soluble vitamins must dissolve in water before they are absorbed by the body. These include vitamins B-complex, B6, B-12, C and folate (B-9). Since the body doesn't store these vitamins, excess amounts are eliminated when you urinate. If you take too many water-soluble vitamins, they simply pass right through your system without providing any real benefit.

MINERALS

Minerals are inorganic elements that are present in soil and water, and are absorbed by plants or consumed by animals. The minerals most people are familiar with include calcium, sodium and potassium. Our bodies also require trace minerals in small amounts like copper, iodine and zinc.

DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

The term dietary supplement refers to a wide range of products like vitamins, minerals, herbs, amino acids and enzymes. It's important to know this term because it's sometimes used interchangeably with "vitamins and minerals."

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DECODING THE LABELS



If you're not sure how much of a vitamin or mineral to take, start by reading the labels. Here are a few key terms to understand.

- **RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance) or AI (Adequate Intake)** – indicates the amounts of vitamins and/or minerals you need to stay healthy and well-nourished. You'll often notice different amounts recommended for women, men and various age groups.
- **UL (Tolerable Upper Intake Level)** – UL refers to the maximum dose of daily vitamins and minerals you can safely take without risking an overdose or serious side effects.
- **DV (Daily Value)** – DV is a reference number that is often found on food and supplement labels. It's the recommended dosage of vitamins and/or nutrients based on a 2,000 calorie-per-day diet. "DV" and "RDA" are sometimes used interchangeably.

There are typically no health advantages to taking more than the recommended dosages of vitamins and minerals. At that point, in fact, you are simply wasting money.

BUYER BEWARE

Since dietary supplements are not regulated by the U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) or the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), there are a few questions you should ask before purchasing.

Was the product tested by a third party?	Does it have a USP seal?	Does it contain unnecessary ingredients?	Are there any possible interactions with my current medications?
			
This type of outside testing helps verify that the ingredients listed on the label are accurate.	The USP (United States Pharmacopeia) is an independent, nonprofit organization that ensures dietary supplements are accurately labeled and are safe.	If you see a product that includes ingredients beyond the basics, think twice. Those extras are often unnecessary and can cause side effects.	Consult with your healthcare provider before adding any supplements to your routine to ensure they don't negatively interact with medications you're already taking. Pharmacists also are good sources of information.

NOW... WHAT TO TAKE?

About half of American adults take supplements. Most take them because they know they're missing a certain food group in their regular diets, while others want the added benefits from substances like antioxidants, which protect the body from certain diseases.

Regardless of your reasons for adding supplements to your routine, it's important to first discuss your specific needs with your healthcare provider. Below are a few vitamins and minerals that can benefit most people.

- Vitamin A
- Vitamin B
- Vitamin C
- Vitamin D
- Vitamin E
- Vitamin K
- Calcium
- Iron
- Zinc

For simplicity, many people opt for a multivitamin that contains the ingredients listed above, plus a few more.

Eating a healthy, well-balanced diet is the best way to keep your body in top nutritional condition. If that's not possible, have a discussion with your healthcare provider about the supplements you should add.

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