

Stay

Healthy

Subscribe Today For A Healthier Tomorrow



Weekly

eNewsletter



According to Nutritionists, These Are the 7 Ingredients Your Multivitamin Should Have

Medically reviewed by *Lindsay Slowiczek, PharmD* — By *Gabrielle Kassel* —

While you should aim to get your necessary nutrients from food by eating a varied diet, multivitamins may help if you are unable to or if you have a deficiency.

Our obsession with supplements has reached \$30 billion a year. And the top of that list? Multivitamins.

“I try to get all of my nutrients from my kitchen instead of my medicine cabinet, but as a realist, I know that meeting my nutrition needs all of the time is not possible,” says Bonnie Taub-Dix, RDN, creator of Better Than Dieting. On top of that, there may be other life factors that make supplementation necessary — pregnancy, menopause, or even chronic conditions.

One 2002 review found that vitamin deficiencies are commonly linked to chronic diseases, and supplementation may help. Even a complete diet may not be giving you the nutrients you need, when you need them. That’s where multivitamins come in.

For starters, a daily multivitamin can help provide a good foundation for your health. It can also protect you when you’re experiencing stress, sleeping poorly, or not getting regular exercise. Even with a “perfect” diet, these issues can make it tough for your body to properly absorb the nutri-

ents, explains nutritionist Dawn Lerman, MA, CHHC, LCAT, AADP.

But with so many vitamin and mineral combos, how do we know exactly what to look for when shopping for a multivitamin? Luckily, you don’t need an advanced degree in nutrition to figure out which multi is worth taking with your morning OJ. We asked four experts to tell us which seven ingredients your multivitamin should have, no matter what brand you choose.

1. Vitamin D

Vitamin D helps our bodies absorb calcium, which is important for bone health. Not getting enough of this vitamin can increase:

- your likelihood of getting sick
- your chances of bone and back pain
- bone and hair loss

While you technically should be able to get your daily vitamin D by being in the sunlight for 15 minutes, the reality is that over 40 percent of people in the United States don’t. Living in wintry locations with little sunlight, working an office 9 to 5 life, and applying sunscreen (which blocks vitamin D synthesis) makes getting vitamin D hard. This vitamin is also hard to come by in food, which is why Taub-Dix says to look for this ingredient in your multi.

Pro-tip: The National Institutes of Health (NIH) recommends that children 1-13 years of age and adults 19-70, including pregnant and breastfeeding women, get 600 IU of vitamin D per day. Older adults should get 800 IU.

2. Magnesium

Magnesium is an essential nutrient, which means that we must get it from food or supplements. Lerman notes that magnesium is best known for being important to our bone health and energy production. However, magnesium may have more benefits than that. She adds that this mineral can also:

- Calm our nervous system and reduce stress after 90 days
- Ease sleep problems, as suggested by an older study
- Regulate muscle and nerve function
- Balance blood sugar levels
- Make protein, bone, and even DNA

But a lot of people are magnesium deficient because they aren't eating the right foods, not because they need supplements. Try eating more pumpkin, spinach, artichoke, soybeans, beans, tofu, brown rice, or nuts (especially Brazil nuts) before jumping to supplements for solutions.

Pro-tip: Lerman suggests looking for a supplement with 300-320 mg of magnesium. The NIH agrees recommending no more than a 350-mg supplement for adults. The best forms are aspartate, citrate, lactate, and chloride which the body absorbs more completely.

3. Calcium

Over 40 percent of the U.S. population doesn't get enough calcium from their diet. This means those people aren't getting the mineral they need for strong bones and teeth. Women in particular start losing bone density earlier, and getting enough calcium from the start is the best nutritional defense against this loss.

If your diet is rich in these foods, you're likely getting enough calcium already.

Pro-tip: The recommended amount of calcium per day is 1,000 mg for most adults, and while you probably don't need to get all of your calcium needs from a multivitamin, you do want there to be some, Lerman explains. Jonathan Valdez, RDN, spokesperson for the New York State Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and owner of Genki Nutrition recommends that you get calcium in the form of calcium citrate. This form optimizes bioavailability, causing less symptoms in people who have absorption issues.

4. Zinc

"Zinc tends to be low in older people and anyone under a lot of stress," says Lerman. Which, (hello!) is basically everyone. And it makes sense. Zinc supports our immune system and helps our body use carbohydrates, protein, and fat for energy. It also aids in wound healing.

The average American diet isn't rich in foods that offer zinc, and the body can't store zinc, which is why Lerman recommends your daily supplements highlight this ingredient.



Pro-tip: Lerman suggests finding a multivitamin that has 5-10 mg of zinc. The NIH suggests you get approximately 8-11 mg of zinc daily, so the amount you want your multivitamin to have depends on your diet.

5. Iron

"Iron should be in your multivitamin, but not everyone needs the same amount of iron," Lerman advises. Some of the benefits of iron include:

- Increased energy
- Better brain function
- Healthy red blood cells

Those who eat red meats typically get enough iron, but certain circumstances like having your menstrual cycle, going through puberty, and being pregnant may increase the amount of iron you need. This is because iron is essential during times of rapid growth and development. Vegetarians and vegans may also want to make sure their multivitamin has iron, especially if they're not supplementing meat with other iron-rich foods.

Pro-tip: "Look for a multi with around 18 mg of iron in the form of ferrous sulfate, ferrous gluconate, ferric citrate, or ferric sulfate," suggests Valdez. Any more than that and Valdez says you may feel nauseous.

6. Folate

Folate (or folic acid) is best known for aiding in fetus development and preventing birth defects. But if you're growing out your nails, fighting depression, or looking to combat inflammation, this ingredient is important, too.

Foods with folate

- Dark leafy greens
- Avocado
- Beans
- Citrus

Pro-tip: You should aim to get around 400 mcg of folate, or 600 mcg if you're pregnant. "When choosing a multi, look for methyl folate on the label. It's a more active form which generally indicates a more whole-full product," suggests Isabel K Smith, MS, RD, CDN. Valdez adds that when you take folate with food, 85 percent of it is absorbed, but when taken on an empty stomach, you'll absorb 100 percent of it. You can shop for folate supplements on Amazon.

7. Vitamin B-12

The B-vitamin complex is like a factory made up of eight diligent workers who band together to create and sustain our body's energy supply by breaking down the micronutrients we consume (fats, proteins, carbs).

But each has a specialized role, too. Lerman says that specifically, vitamin B-12 works to keep the body's nerve and blood cells healthy and helps make DNA, the genetic material in all cells. Vegan or vegetarians are prone to vitamin B-12 deficiency because most food sources are animal-based like meat, poultry, fish, and eggs.

Pro-tip: The recommended amount of B-12 is less than 3 mcg, so Lerman recommends looking for a vitamin with 1 to 2 mcg per serving because your body gets rid of any extra B-12 when you pee. B-12 also has many forms, so Smith recommends that you look for a multi that carries B-12 as methylcobalamin (or methyl-B12), which is easiest for our bodies to absorb.

Don't rely on your multivitamin

"This may be obvious, but it's worth repeating: When it comes to vitamins and minerals, get it from food first," Taub-Dix reminds us. Our bodies are designed to reap nutrients from the



food we eat, and we will get all the nutrients we need, as long as we're eating a varied and balanced diet.

Because at the end of the day, supplements should be considered bonus boosters, not replacements for food. And all the experts we spoke to agree: A double-decker with a morning multi just won't cut it.

