

# Getting your nutrients: From the source or supplements?

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(HealthDay)—Americans are making shifts in the supplements they

take—fewer multivitamins and vitamins C and E, more fish oil and vitamin D. Many think of supplements as magic bullets, but studies don't always support their supposed benefits.

Some research is positive. Vitamin D is important for [good health](#) and very hard to get naturally from foods or, if you live in northern latitudes, from the sun. So you might need a supplement to meet daily needs. But first ask your doctor for a [blood test](#) to check your level and, if it's low, whether it's safe for you to sit in the sun twice a week for 15 minutes to allow your body to make D naturally.

Significant studies show that it's better to get certain nutrients directly from food. For instance, while foods high in [omega-3 fatty acids](#), from walnuts to oily fish, have been linked to reduced risk of heart disease, the omega-3s in [fish oil](#) capsules may not deliver the same benefits.

A 2018 study conducted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture found that many supplements—from vitamins A and D to the minerals selenium and chromium—contain higher amounts of the nutrient than stated on the label. That's a concern because some good-for-you supplements can be harmful at high doses—even calcium, which is highly touted for bone health. If you can't get enough calcium through diet and bone density testing shows that you need to supplement, ask your doctor about safe limits.

In fact, whether you're thinking about an herbal supplement or a proven vitamin or mineral, talk to your health care provider first. Some may interact with medications you take or could pose a risk if you have an illness or are scheduled for surgery.

**More information:** The U.S. National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health has more on [supplements](#) and how to use them safely.

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