

Three in ten Americans increased supplement use since onset of pandemic

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Twenty-nine percent of Americans are taking more supplements today than they were before the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing the percentage of U.S. supplement-takers to 76%, according to a new survey conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of Samueli Foundation. Nearly two-thirds of those who increased supplement use (65%) cited a desire to enhance

their overall immunity (57%) or protection from COVID-19 (36%) as reasons for the increase. Other common reasons for increasing supplement use were to take their health into their own hands (42%), improve their sleep (41%), and improve their mental health (34%).

"The COVID-19 pandemic is a catalyst for increased [supplement](#) use," said Wayne Jonas, MD, executive director of Integrative Health Programs at Samueli Foundation. "Supplements—when used under the guidance of [health](#) care professionals—can be beneficial for one's health. Unfortunately, however, many people are unaware of the risks and [safety issues](#) associated with their use."

More than half of Americans taking supplements (52%) mistakenly believe that most [dietary supplements](#) available for purchase have been declared safe and effective by the Food and Drug Administration, according to the June 2021 online survey of more than 2,000 U.S. adults. Nearly one-third of supplement-takers (32%) believe that if a supplement could be dangerous, it would not be allowed to be sold in the U.S.

"Contrary to what many believe, the FDA does not regulate supplements. In fact, many supplements are not identified as dangerous until after people are negatively affected by them," said Jonas. "There are benefits to one's health from supplements, but also risks, so I encourage anyone who is taking a supplement or thinking of taking one to discuss it with your health care provider first."

Fewer than half of Americans who use supplements (47%) say they consulted with their health care provider before use, despite national guidelines that strongly recommend doing so. Further, 46% of Americans currently taking prescription medications say they have not discussed with their [health provider](#) the potential interactions that supplements could have with their prescriptions. But the desire to speak

to their physicians is there.

Four in five Americans said they would feel comfortable sharing which supplements they take with their health care provider (81%) and say it is important to tell their health care provider whether or not they are taking supplements (80%). They also identified various barriers to discussing supplements with their [health care providers](#):

-41% of those currently taking supplements said that it hasn't occurred to them to discuss their supplement use with their health care provider, including half of those ages 18-34 (49%).

-35% of all Americans said they don't think their health care provider is interested in whether or not they are taking supplements.

-32% of Americans don't think their health care provider knows enough about supplements to advise them properly.

-26% of those currently taking supplements are worried that their health care provider will judge them based on the supplements they are taking.

"As more people begin taking supplements, we need to be sure that they have the information needed to make informed and healthy decisions," said Jonas. "My obligation, as a physician, is to help patients understand which supplements can play a safe and effective part of their overall health and well-being goals. The good news is that patients are willing to discuss this topic, but it is up to providers to ask."

Other findings from the survey showed further differences based on race and ethnicity:

-86% of White (non-Hispanic) Americans said they would be comfortable sharing which supplements they take with their health care

provider, compared to only 67% of Hispanics and 75% of Blacks.

-Black (49%) and Hispanic (50%) supplement users were more likely than Whites (36%) to say that it hasn't occurred to them to discuss their supplement use with their health care provider.

-More than 1 in 3 Hispanic adults (35%) said they worry that their health care provider will judge them based on the supplements they take, and 46% said they don't think their health care provider is interested (compared to 31% of White (non-Hispanic) adults).

Provided by Samueli Foundation

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