

## HYPE-WORTHY SUPPLEMENTS

For too many, the benefits claimed are endless—and mostly untrue or at least embellished. But these five deliver.

By Todd Souira



You eat right. You exercise regularly. You feel healthy and fit. And not just for someone your age. You're feeling better at 45 than you did at 25. But you walked past a GNC at the mall and wondered, Could I be even fitter?

For those of us who aren't professional athletes, the realm of nutritional supplements is one shrouded in mystery. You've seen some musclehead at the gym or on TV throw down a Creatine shake. That's his thing, you thought. I definitely don't want to look like *that*. And anyway, the bits and pieces you've heard about supplements have led you to understand that there's little hard evidence that they actually do what they claim to do. Still, you're curious.

Is there value in supplements or are they worthless? Yes. Some are worthless. In fact, most are worthless. But some do possess the capacity to significantly improve your health.

What follows are my five most valuable nutritional supplements. You'll find each in my medicine or kitchen cabinets. Nothing over the top. Just basic building blocks. (Remember to consult an appropriate professional or your physician before incorporating these supplements or any others into your diet.)

### Multivitamins/-minerals

Without them, you likely already satisfy most of your body's daily vitamin and mineral quotas as long as you adhere to a balanced diet. In fact, you probably even provide more in some cases than what's needed, requiring your body to eliminate the excess (which means exactly what you think it does).

So what's the point of taking a multivitamin/-mineral? To close the gaps that your diet does not cover. It's essential. In an ideal world, we should be topping off every area of need with food alone. But who's that perfect? So your body only ends up using 10 percent of the multivitamin/-mineral. It's not like the other 90 percent is going to begin ravaging you from the inside out. Your reserves are topped off and you've got some to spare.

### Omega-3 Fatty Acids

It's most commonly referred to as fish oil, but O3s can also be found in walnuts and hemp, chia and flax seeds. The sum of their benefits is still being heavily researched, but the list seems to grow daily. They may aid in all of the following: lowering blood pressure, lowering triglycerides, increasing HDL cholesterol (the good one), improving vision, improving brain and memory function, reducing the risk of heart disease, reducing the risk of cancer and reducing inflammation. It may also act as an antidepressant.

If you opt for fish oil, make sure it's a quality product that's been tested for purity and that it's free of mercury and other contaminants.

### Probiotics

Step right up for some live bacteria. And, please, come back for seconds. Probiotics are a healthy bacteria. I know, *tomat-o, tomat-ab*. But probiotics are essential for proper digestion and maintaining a strong immune system. The bacteria enables us to better absorb nutrients. It also fights off harmful bacteria and yeast.

Yogurt is a common source. But adding a supplement with a variety of probiotics to your diet is something to seriously consider—more bang for your buck—especially if you've been on antibiotics recently. (Antibiotics kill all bacteria, good and bad.)

### Vitamin D

Vitamin D, scientists discovered recently, influences more than 200 genes, some of which are tied to cancer and autoimmune diseases. The big D also helps fend off osteoporosis and high blood pressure. Our body creates it on its own through exposure to sunlight, which is an issue for those of us here in the northeast come winter. The use of sunscreen may also block our body's ability to produce it during all other times of the year when we're basking in the sun's warm glow.

So a vitamin D supplement may not be a bad idea. Just make sure you go with vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol). The most common dose is 200 iu to 800 iu, but it's best to let your physician determine what suits you.

### Magnesium

Over 300 enzymes in the body require magnesium to function properly. Muscle and nerve function and communication also depend on it. Magnesium strengthens bones, relaxes muscles, supports the circulatory system and keeps our brains firing on all cylinders. The bottom line: It's a critical mineral and too many of us are deficient in it.

Magnesium-rich foods are not a regular guest at our dinner tables. Spinach is the most common source. But who eats the stuff daily? Another culprit: most multivitamins contain very little magnesium. The recommended daily allowance is 300 mg to 400 mg.

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