



Let's Move

by UnitedHealthcare®



Exploring essential nutrients and dietary supplements¹

A balanced eating plan should provide optimal amounts of essential nutrients, including proteins, essential fats, minerals and vitamins.

What are nutrients?

Nutrients are essential compounds that sustain life and health. They are divided into two main types: macronutrients (you need these in larger amounts: carbohydrates, protein and fat) and micronutrients (you need these in smaller amounts: vitamins and minerals). Compared to nutrients in supplement form, nutrients in foods are complex and offer a variety of benefits that work together in our bodies. For example, an orange provides Vitamin C as well as beta-carotene, calcium and other essential nutrients. The true power of how nutrients work together is an ongoing area of study.

Nutrients of concern for older adults²

Vitamin B12: Vital for red blood cells, nerve health and converting folate into active form. Absorption may decrease with age and certain medications. Consider using a vitamin B12 supplement, especially if you have absorption problems or are a strict vegetarian or vegan.

Vitamin D: Helps absorption and use of calcium and phosphorous for bone health. Also involved in muscle movement, nerve function and immune system protection. Vitamin D is scarcely found in foods and is often consumed below recommended levels. Talk to your health care provider about using a supplement.

Vitamin B6: Vital for red blood cell formation and metabolizing macronutrients.

Calcium: Works with vitamin D to support bone strength; involved with muscle contraction, blood clotting, and absorption of vitamins B12 and D.

Protein: Critical for preventing the loss of lean muscle mass. Diversify your protein sources beyond meat to include seafood, tofu, edamame, beans, peas and lentils.

Dietary supplements 101

As defined by the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (1994), a dietary supplement is intended to supplement the diet. It also contains one or more dietary ingredients, is meant to be taken by mouth and must be clearly labeled as a supplement.

Dietary supplements contain ingredients including vitamins, minerals, herbs, amino acids and other substances. They are available in forms including pills, capsules, powders, gel capsules and liquids. Some supplement ingredients are added to foods and drinks and sold as nutritional supplements.

Dietary supplements can play a role in adding nutrients to your diet and can reduce health risks. Supplements also offer convenient sources of essential elements. Certain supplements can support optimal health, but much of the current research is mixed. Always consult a knowledgeable and credentialed health care professional before taking dietary supplements to avoid problems including negative interactions with your medications.

Categories of supplements:

Nutrients: Also known as nutraceuticals, nutrients include ingredients naturally found in food. Nutrients include vitamins, minerals, phytochemicals, antioxidants, amino acids, proteins and essential fatty acids.

Herbal: Also known as botanicals or medicinal herbs, herbals contain one or more herbs with potential therapeutic effects. Herbals are derived from plants, algae, fungi or a combination of these. Herbals are available in forms including teas, extracts, tablets, capsules and powders.

Hormones: Substances that aid in balancing and optimizing hormone levels in the body. Hormones often include bioidentical versions derived from sources including animals, plants, and microorganisms as well as those that are synthetically manufactured. Hormones are also known as hormone replacement therapy, which requires skillful administration by highly trained practitioners.

¹National Institutes of Health - Office of Dietary Supplements: <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/DietarySupplements-Consumer/>

²Dietary Supplement Ingredient Directory: <https://www.fda.gov/food/dietary-supplements/dietary-supplement-ingredient-directory>

This communication is going to eligible members and is not intended to imply the recipient has a specific condition or disease.

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