

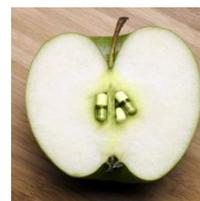
The 18 Best Supplements for Women

The 18 Best Supplements for Women

- **Supplement Your Diet**

Women of every age, height, weight, and activity level have at least one thing in common: We need certain nutrients that our bodies don't make, but require to function properly.

Most experts agree the best source of essential nutrients is whole food: "We get a wide variety of nutrients from eating fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats, often in perfect proportions," says Women's Health Nutrition Expert and Registered Dietitian Keri Glassman. "We rarely over or under do it."



That being said, it's difficult to know with 100 percent certainty that we're getting precisely enough nutrients to fend off symptoms of deficiency and related illnesses. Stage cue, supplements! Taking specific supplements is like insurance for those instances when you accidentally consume your weight's-worth of sweets and call it dinner. (We know—it was just that one Halloween...) And if you have or are at risk for a vitamin and/or mineral deficiency, as may be the case for pregnant women or vegetarians, then your doctor may need to intervene by recommending a supplement.

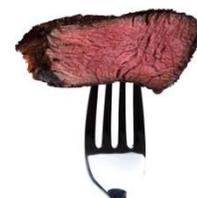
Your choice to take a supplement depends on your diet and doctor's recommendation. "When considering supplements, women need to think bones, babies, and bellies," says Glassman. "Sufficient bone density is needed to prevent osteoporosis, an adequate store of folate is essential for fertility and fetal development, and a healthy waistline lowers the risk of cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases. Women must also load up on the nutrients that are essential to prevent chronic diseases in the future."

With these guidelines, we bring you the best supplements for women. Bring the list to your doc to determine which supplements are right for you.

- **Iron**

What it does

Carries oxygen in the body; aids in the production of red blood cells; supports immune function, cognitive development, and temperature regulation; is essential for proper cell growth.



Why you need it

Slacking on your iron intake causes your body to reduce the production of red blood cells, causing anemia. This can lead to unrelenting fatigue and shortness of breath while doing activities that aren't very strenuous, as well as difficulty maintaining body temperature and decreased immune function, which increases susceptibility to infection. What's more, blood loss during your period depletes your body's iron stores, so it's particularly important for women with heavy periods to eat iron-rich foods or take supplements, says Carol Haggans, R.D., a consultant for the National Institutes of Health.

Where to find it

Lean red meat, chicken, turkey, fish, cereals, beans, whole grains, and dark-green leafy vegetables. (If you're not eating enough of these foods, talk to your doc about trying a ferrous sulfate supplement since it's most easily absorbed, says nutrition expert Cynthia Sass, R.D. And don't forget to sneak in foods rich in Vitamin C since they enhance your body's iron absorption.)

- **Calcium**

What it does

Makes and keeps bones and teeth strong; helps muscles and blood vessels contract and expand; secretes hormones; and sends messages through the nervous system.

**Why you need it**

Your body needs calcium to build and maintain strong bones. Thus, calcium consumption is important for aging adults, particularly postmenopausal women whose bone breakdown exceeds formation, resulting in bone loss and increased risk of osteoporosis over time. "Women start losing bone density in their twenties," says Mary Ellen Camire, Ph.D., a nutrition professor at the University of Maine at Orono. "Calcium is your single best defense, and you should start taking it now."

Where to find it

Dairy products such as milk, cheese and yogurt, and dark-green leafy vegetables such as broccoli and kale.

- **Magnesium**

What it does

Maintains normal muscle and nerve function; keeps heart rhythm steady; supports a healthy immune system; keeps bones strong; helps regulate blood sugar levels; promotes normal blood pressure; may play a role in preventing and managing disorders such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes; and is known to be involved in energy metabolism and protein synthesis.

**Why you need it**

Magnesium is needed for more than 300 biochemical reactions in the body, but there are other reasons you won't want to run low on it, including deficiency symptoms such as chronic or excessive vomiting and diarrhea, and migraines. "Blood vessels in your brain constrict, and receptors in the feel-good chemical serotonin malfunction," says Alexander Mauskop, M.D., director of the New York Headache Center. If you suffer from Crohn's disease or another gastrointestinal disorder that makes it difficult for your body to absorb nutrients, you may be at risk for magnesium deficiency.

Where to find it

Green vegetables (like okra; pictured), some beans, nuts, seeds, and unrefined whole grains.

- **Vitamin A**

What it does

Ensures proper development and functioning of our eyes, skin, immune system, and many other parts of our bodies.

**Why you need it**

Vitamin A plays a vital role in vision support. Research also suggests that vitamin A may reduce the mortality rate from measles, prevent some types of cancer, aid in growth and development, and improve immune function.

Where to find it

Leafy green vegetables, orange and yellow vegetables, tomato products, fruits, dairy products, liver, fish, and fortified cereals. (Vitamin A is also available in multivitamins and stand-alone supplement, often in the form of retinyl acetate or retinyl palmitate.)

- **Folate**

What it does

Helps produce and maintain new cells, including red blood cells; maintains proper balance in the nervous system's message-carrying molecules and is necessary for proper brain function for in mental and emotional health.

**Why you need it**

Folate is imperative for the prevention of anemia and is absolutely essential to any pregnancy. Folate deficiency during pregnancy can lead to serious complications, including premature births and infants born with neural tube defects. Studies show that women who take folic acid supplements before conception and during the first trimester may reduce their risk of having children with neural tube defects by 72 to 100 percent. The daily recommended amount is 400 micrograms, but this need increases to 600 micrograms for pregnant women and 500 micrograms for those lactating. Furthermore, people with low intake of folate are also at increased risk for certain types of cancer.

Where to find it

Natural sources include leafy green vegetables, fruits, and beans; the synthetic form of folate (folic acid) is found in supplements and often added to enriched cereals, breads, pastas, and rice.

- **Biotin**

What it does

Aids in the formation of fatty acids and blood sugar, which are used in the production of energy for the body; and helps metabolize amino acids and carbohydrates.

**Why you need it**

While a lack of biotin is rare, getting sufficient amounts staves off signs of deficiency including hair loss, brittle nails, and a scaly, red facial rash. Luckily, these you can alleviate these symptoms by boosting your biotin intake, which also helps neurological symptoms, such as mild depression, in adults.

Where to find it

Cauliflower, liver, avocado, and raspberries.

- **Other B Vitamins**

What it does

Help the body to convert food into fuel for energy; contribute to healthy skin, hair, and eyes, and proper nervous system functioning; maintain metabolism, muscle tone, and a sharp mind.

**Why you need it**

Deficiency of certain B vitamins, often referred to as B complex vitamins, can cause a host of awful symptoms: It can cause anemia, tiredness, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, depression, numbness and tingling in the arms and legs, muscle cramps, respiratory infections, hair loss, eczema, poor growth in children, and birth defects. You don't want that.

Where to find it

Fish, poultry, meat, eggs, dairy products, leafy green vegetables, legumes, many cereals, and some breads.

- **Vitamin C**

What it does

Facilitates normal growth and development and repairs bodily tissues, bones, and teeth; helps the body make collagen, an important protein used to make skin, cartilage, tendons, ligaments, and blood vessels; and functions as an antioxidant to block some of the damage caused by free radicals.

**Why you need it**

Vitamin C's healing and antioxidant powers make it essential. Signs of vitamin deficiency include dry and splitting hair; gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) and bleeding gums; rough, dry, scaly skin; decreased wound-healing rate; easy bruising; nosebleeds; and a decreased ability to fight infection. A severe form of vitamin C deficiency is known as scurvy. Despite its rep as a cold fighter, C has never been proven to prevent or cure the sniffles, but the antioxidant is believed to boost your immune system. It is also often used as an ingredient in skincare products since vitamin C can boost your body's collagen production to help reduce wrinkles and can also firm up and moisturize your skin.

Where to find it

All fruits and vegetables, particularly citrus fruits, red pepper, and broccoli. The synthetic variety is known as ascorbic acid.

- **Vitamin D**

What it does

Promotes calcium absorption necessary for bone growth; modulation of cell growth; neuromuscular and immune function; and reduction of inflammation.

Why you need it

Without sufficient vitamin D, bones can become thin, brittle, or misshapen, leading to osteomalacia, or a softening of the bones, which can weaken muscles, too. Vitamin D deficiency has also been shown to play a role in the development of type 1 and type 2 diabetes. In good news though, evidence suggests that vitamin D may provide some protection against colorectal and possibly other cancers.

Where to find it

Flesh of fatty fish, such as salmon and tuna, and fish liver oils, with small amounts in beef liver, cheese, and egg yolks; and vitamin-D-fortified milk and orange juice.

Note: While vitamin D occurs naturally in very few foods, most people actually meet at least some of their vitamin D needs through exposure to sunlight.



- **Omega 3**

What it does

Assists in proper brain operation; is important for cognitive (brain memory and performance) and behavioral function; helps reduce high blood pressure; calms inflammation.

**Why you need it**

Research shows that omega-3 fatty acids reduce inflammation and may help lower risk of

chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, arthritis, and other joint problems. What's more, studies have found that those who ate more fish high in omega-3 fatty acids were less likely to have macular degeneration (a condition that steals your central vision) than those who ate less fish.

Where to find it

Fish—particularly fatty fish like salmon, tuna, sardines, and mackerel—and plants and nut oils. (Fish oil capsules are also a great option, but take less than 3 grams a day since fish oil can thin your blood.)

- **Melatonin**

What it does

Helps regulate other hormones; maintains the body's circadian rhythm, an internal 24-hour clock that plays a critical role in when we fall asleep and wake up; helps control the timing and release of female reproductive hormones (determining when a woman starts to menstruate, the frequency and duration of menstrual cycles, and when a woman stops menstruating, i.e. starts menopause).

Why you need it

Melatonin plays a large role in regulating your sleep schedule. When it gets dark at night, a nerve pathway in your eye sends a signal to the brain to tell the pineal gland to start secreting melatonin, which makes you sleepy. Low levels of melatonin—along with screwing up your Zzzs—can also increase your risk for breast cancer.

Where to find it

Tablets, capsules, creams, and lozenges. (There is currently no recommended dose for melatonin supplements but the best approach is to begin with a very low dose—about 200 mcg).

- **Probiotics**

What it does

Aids in digestion; fights off disease-causing bacteria; can reduce diarrhea caused by certain infections, chemotherapy, and irritable bowel syndrome.

Why you need it

Since the mid-1990s, clinical studies have established that probiotic therapy can help treat a number of ills, including diarrhea, vaginal yeast and urinary tract infections, irritable bowel syndrome, and certain intestinal infections, while also reducing bladder cancer recurrence and preventing or reducing the severity of colds and flu.



Where to find it

Yogurt, kefir, and other dairy products. (Not into dairy? There are a variety of supplements from which you can choose as well.)

- **Coenzyme Q10**

What it does

Necessary for basic cell function; helps cells manage your body's energy supply; is a powerful antioxidant.

Why you need it

Some researchers believe CoQ10 may help with heart-related conditions by lowering blood pressure and boosting your levels of ecSOD, an enzyme thought to protect blood vessels from damage. Studies also suggest that CoQ10 may fight cancer, Parkinson's disease, and Huntington's disease, as well as improve physical performance while exercising. Japanese researchers, for instance, found CoQ10 supplementation decreased exercise-induced muscle injury.



Where to find it

Occurs naturally in the body. (As you get older, production decreases. The only way to get back up to youthful levels is by taking a supplement.)

- **Green Tea**

What it does

Acts as a powerful antioxidant.

Why you need it

Epigallocatechin-3-gallate (EGCG) is the most studied polyphenol antioxidant found in green tea and the most active. Clinical studies have revealed that this antioxidant may help reduce the risk of heart disease by lowering cholesterol, as well as have anti-inflammatory and anticancer properties that may help prevent the development and growth of skin tumors.

**Where to find it**

Green tea is widely available. (If you don't like the taste or prefer not to drink it every day, try a supplement.)

- **Grape Seed Extract**

What it does

Treats health problems related to free radical damage, including heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

Why you need it

Stay young from the inside out! Preliminary animal research at the University of Alabama at Birmingham has shown that it may protect brains in ways that fight against future age-related dementia, as well as decrease the development of skin cancer due to UVB radiation exposure. In pill form, it also helps maintain collagen and elastin, two building blocks of smooth skin.

**Where to find it**

Capsules, tablets, and liquid form.

- **Resveratrol**

What it does

Prevents damage to blood vessels; lowers "bad" LDL cholesterol; prevents blood clots.

Why you need it

There are high hopes for resveratrol—mainly the interest in the potential for it to prevent heart disease. There's also research looking in to its ability to inhibit the proliferation of a variety of human cancer cells, including those from breast and colon cancer. What's more, resveratrol seems to interact directly with genes that regulate aging, says David Katz, M.D., founding director of Yale University's Prevention Research Center, so even though you can't stop the clock, you can try to slow it down.

**Where to find it**

Grapes, grape juice, wine (especially red), peanuts, and berries. (Supplements are available as well.)

- **Flaxseed**

What it does

Used as a laxative; helps reduce total blood cholesterol.

Why you need it

Flaxseed is said to lower cholesterol levels, boost the immune system, and protect against cancers, including breast cancer. Note that flaxseed oil contains only omega-3 fatty acids and not the additional fiber or lignans available through the seed, but its health benefits are undeniable, so make sure you are getting enough.

Where to find it

Soft-gel capsules.



- **Multivitamin**

What it does

Helps your body grow, develop, and function normally.

Why you need it

A multivitamin is generally prescribed for those who need extra vitamins, who cannot eat enough food to obtain the required amount, or who cannot receive the full benefits of the vitamins contained in the foods they do eat. "I used to say 'For insurance, take a daily multivitamin,' but in light of recent research I now recommend taking one every other day," says Glassman. "It's not going to hurt you, but the research is compelling enough to believe that you're OK cutting back to every other day."

Where to find it Tablets, chewables, capsules, and oral liquid. (Look for 100 percent of the Recommended Daily Allowance for most vitamins and essential minerals.)

