

The Honest Multivitamin Plan

For anyone who takes a daily multivitamin, or keeps almost buying one, and wants to know what it does and does not do. Every line below restates a claim verified against Tier-1 medical sources. Nothing here is invented, and nothing is for sale.

✓ CHECKED AGAINST NIH OFFICE OF DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS · HARVARD HEALTH PUBLISHING

1

Disease prevention is not the reason

The NIH Office of Dietary Supplements cites a 2018 meta-analysis of over 2 million participants in which multivitamin use was not associated with better cardiovascular outcomes. (NIH ODS)

2

Filling gaps is measurable

In a 90,771-person cohort, nutrient adequacy was about 74 to 76 percent from food alone and rose to roughly 84 percent among multivitamin users. (NIH ODS)

3

There is no legal definition

ODS states multivitamins have no standard or regulatory definition; manufacturers decide which nutrients go in and at what levels. (NIH ODS)

1. Decide what you are buying it for

Insurance against a gap, not protection from disease.

WHY THIS WORKS

The NIH Office of Dietary Supplements reports that multivitamin use was not associated with lower risk of cardiovascular events or mortality across large meta-analyses, and Harvard Health states plainly that taking them does not offer special health benefits or disease protection. What they do reliably is raise nutrient intakes when food is not covering them.

SOURCE: NIH OFFICE OF DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

DO THIS WEEK

- ☐ Write down the reason you take it
- ☐ If the reason is disease prevention, reconsider
- ☐ If the reason is a known gap, keep going
- ☐ Ask your clinician whether a blood test is warranted

2. Know the gaps that actually show up

Three deficiencies are common enough to name.

WHY THIS WORKS

Harvard Health names vitamin B12, B6 and D, plus minerals such as calcium and magnesium, as the shortfalls that appear most often in older adults, and notes B12 absorption can fall with reduced stomach acid from aging or from long-term acid-reducing medication. A blood test identifies most deficiencies, and a targeted single nutrient may beat a broad multi.

SOURCE: HARVARD HEALTH PUBLISHING

DO THIS WEEK

- ☐ Ask about B12 if you take acid reducers long term
- ☐ Ask about vitamin D if you get little sun
- ☐ Prefer food sources first where you can
- ☐ Let a test, not a guess, drive a single-nutrient supplement

3. Avoid the overshoot

The real risk of a multivitamin is too much, not too little.

WHY THIS WORKS

ODS reports that multivitamins can push intakes above the Tolerable Upper Intake Level. In one large cohort, 10 to 15

DO THIS WEEK

- ☐ List every supplement you take, not just the multi
- ☐ Look for nutrients that appear twice across products

percent of users had excessive intakes of vitamin A, iron and zinc, and 48 to 61 percent had excessive niacin. Excess intakes are even more likely among people who also take single-nutrient supplements on top of a multi.

SOURCE: NIH OFFICE OF DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

- ☐ Be wary of anything labelled high potency
- ☐ Bring the list to your next appointment

4. Choose on the label, not the front of the bottle

Two things separate a sensible multi from marketing.

WHY THIS WORKS

Harvard Health notes the FDA regulates multivitamins as a food subcategory, which leaves wide leeway in how products are presented, and recommends buying a brand carrying an NSF International or US Pharmacopeia verification seal for confidence in the ingredients. ODS adds that basic broad-spectrum products keep most nutrients at or below the Daily Value, while high-potency ones can exceed the upper limit.

SOURCE: HARVARD HEALTH PUBLISHING

DO THIS WEEK

- ☐ Look for an NSF or USP seal on the label
- ☐ Choose a basic broad-spectrum formula
- ☐ Check the percent Daily Value column, not the claims
- ☐ Skip proprietary blends that hide amounts

EVERY CLAIM ABOVE, TRACED TO ITS SOURCE

NIH Office of Dietary Supplements, Multivitamin/mineral Supplements Fact Sheet for Health Professionals · <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/MVMS-HealthProfessional/>

Harvard Health Publishing, Is it okay to take multivitamins? · <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthy-aging-and-longevity/is-it-okay-to-take-multivitamins>

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