

# What you need to know about taking HEALTH SUPPLEMENTS



**The use** of health supplements is increasingly popular over the years. But, do you know that health supplements are not tested and not regulated by the Government for safety and effectiveness?

Therefore, it is very important to know more about these products before taking them.

## More than just vitamins...

Health supplements include:

- Vitamin and mineral supplements (e.g. vitamin C, folic acid and calcium)
- Amino acids (e.g. Creatine and L-lysine)
- Plant extracts (e.g. garlic, soy isoflavones and ginkgo biloba)
- Animal substances (e.g. fish oil, glucosamine and shark cartilage)
- Others (e.g. Omega-3 fatty acids).

*They come in various forms such as capsules, tablets, soft-gels, liquids and syrups.*

# Sale and claims of health supplements

Currently, health supplements do not require the approval of Health Sciences Authority to be sold and supplied in Singapore.

The responsibility rests with the importer, manufacturer and seller of health supplements that the products are safe and that the claims are truthful, accurate and sufficiently supported by scientific evidence.

## Health supplements should not be used to prevent, treat or cure diseases

Many health supplements contain active ingredients that can strongly affect your body. You can harm your body when you:

- take a combination of supplements
- use supplements together with medicines
- take supplements in place of the medicines.

For example, some vitamins and minerals can interfere with the absorption of others. By supplementing your diet, you may unknowingly cause a deficiency in another nutrient.

# Role of health supplements in promoting health

**Most of us** get all the nutrients, i.e. proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals that our body requires from a variety of foods in a balanced diet. There is **no need** for health supplements.

It is not true that foods today contain lesser nutrients than in the past. In fact, modern food technology reduces nutrient loss (e.g. during transport and storage) and increases nutrient levels (e.g. milk is fortified by the addition of vitamin D).

## Amount of nutrients for health



The Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) show the **average** daily amounts of nutrients that would promote good health in a healthy person.

The RDA is not meant to provide large amounts of nutrients for purpose of treatment. You do not have to take more than the RDA to have good health.



**Do not**  
self-diagnose any  
condition or self-medicate  
using health supplements.  
Always consult a doctor,  
pharmacist or nutritionist/  
dietician before you take  
health supplements.

You can refer to the RDA for Singaporeans at HealthHub's website at [www.healthhub.sg](http://www.healthhub.sg). The Health Promotion Board (HPB) constantly reviews and updates the RDA.

However, **people having a restricted diet or with higher nutrient needs** can benefit from certain health supplements, especially vitamin and mineral supplements.

Examples include:

CATEGORY OF PEOPLE	MAY BENEFIT FROM
Pregnant/ breastfeeding women	Iron, folic acid & calcium supplements
Women who plan to conceive	Folic acid supplement
Menopausal women	Calcium supplement
The elderly who tend to eat less	Multi-vitamin-mineral supplement
Strict vegetarians	B-vitamin supplement
People on very low-calorie diets	Multi-vitamin-mineral supplement

# Consider these before you take health supplements

## 1. More may not be better

While vitamin and mineral supplements can help you meet your nutrient needs, they can be harmful when taken in large amounts over time.

For example, too much of fat-soluble vitamins (vitamins A, D, E and K) can be toxic as they are not easily passed out from our body. Remember, you are already getting nutrients from foods. Should you choose to supplement your diet, select a product that does not exceed 100 percent of the RDA.

## 2. Learn to spot false claims

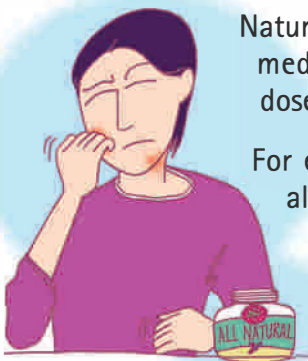
If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Examples of such statements are:

- Quick and effective "cure all"
- "Clinically proven"
- Can "treat" or "cure" diseases
- "Totally safe" and has "definitely no side effects"



### 3. "Natural" does not always mean safe

"Natural" does not mean healthy or safe. Natural ingredients can interact with medicines or are harmful in high doses.



For example, royal jelly can cause allergic reactions in some people, and ginkgo biloba may add to the anti-blood clotting effect of some drugs and cause too much bleeding.

### 4. Importance of evidence

Most health supplements still need thorough research on their safety and benefits. There are many unanswered questions on what active ingredients are responsible in preventing which conditions, their effectiveness, accurate dosages and effects of long-term use.



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For example, there is good evidence that sufficient intake of fruit and vegetables reduce the risk of certain cancers. Fruit and vegetables do not just provide vitamins, they also contain phytochemicals (e.g. carotenoids), which act as antioxidants in our body. However, there is no conclusive evidence that vitamin supplements prevent cancers.

For evidence-based information on health supplement products, visit HealthHub's website at [www.healthhub.sg](http://www.healthhub.sg)

## Remember...

- Health supplements cannot and should not replace a balanced diet consisting of a variety of foods. Foods provide not just nutrients, but also a combination of other components that are protective against diseases. While some of these components are known to researchers, the benefits of many others remain untapped.
- Health supplements should not be used to prevent, treat or cure diseases.
- Some health supplements, especially vitamin and mineral supplements, can help some people meet their nutrient needs as specified in RDA. However, always consult a doctor, pharmacist or nutritionist/dietician before you take health supplements.