



A Healthy Supplement Primer

This is certainly not meant to be a complete discussion of all supplements but only to include some of the more well-known supplements. As with anything you are using to improve your health, discuss supplement use with your doctor or pharmacist as some supplements may have reactions with medication you are prescribed. The following are relatively well accepted supplements.

Omega-3

Omega-3 fatty acids refer to a group of polyunsaturated fatty acids found in certain foods. Alpha-linolenic acid is considered an essential fatty acid (EFA) for humans because the body cannot make it from other fatty acids. It is found in plant foods, specifically flax seeds, walnuts, and hemp seeds. Ground flax seed is the best source of this fatty acid. EPA and DHA are long chain omega-3 fatty acids. They are found in animal foods like fish and wild game. They are the primary components of fish oils that seem to protect against heart attack, stroke, cancer and inflammatory diseases like rheumatoid arthritis. EPA is involved in protection against disease in several ways. The most important include "thinning" the blood and preventing blood clots, and reducing inflammation. Oily fleshed, cold water fish like salmon and sardines are the best sources of EPA, although fish oil capsules are available and may be used if higher amounts of EPA are needed for specific conditions. If you use fish oil capsules, choose a product that is free from heavy metals and toxins that may also contaminate fish.

Probiotics

Probiotics are supplements medications containing potentially beneficial live organisms including bacteria or yeast. Probiotics are intended to help re-establish the body's natural flora, a system of beneficial microorganisms. Probiotics are often used or recommended for helping the body after treatment with antibiotics or for treatment of candidiasis (yeast infection). The most common probiotic is *Lactobacillus acidophilus* though many others are used. There is also some evidence that probiotics may help with lactose intolerance, irritable bowel syndrome and colitis.

It is also useful for anyone who takes antibiotics, especially the broad-spectrum ones like tetracycline and ampicillin. It's useful for women who have frequent vaginal yeast infections. The dose is one tablespoon of the liquid culture or one to two capsules after meals unless the label directs otherwise. *Acidophilus* may help to reduce the chance of getting traveler's diarrhea by strengthening the immune system. Always check the expiration date on acidophilus products. You want to be sure the bacteria in them are alive and in good condition. The best formulation is a live culture that is shipped and stored refrigerated.

Probiotics are also being packaged as part of existing foods, especially yogurt. It is important to note there is some discussion related to the effectiveness of some food probiotics. There is a concern of whether enough probiotic bacteria or yeast are present to offer a benefit. We will have to wait and watch these products to see.

Glucosamine & Chondroitin

Glucosamine Sulfate is a natural product. It is derived from the exoskeletons of various varieties of shellfish. Glucosamine sulfate provides the joints with the building blocks

needed to address changes from normal wear and tear. Specifically, it provides the raw material needed by the body to make new cartilage, a primary component of the joints that connect and cushion bones.

Chondroitin Sulfate is a natural product derived from certified BSE-free bovine sources. Chondroitin protects the cartilage and attracts fluids that give the tissue its shock absorbing quality. Glucosamine & chondroitin ingredients have been the subject of more research over recent years than any other supplements on the market. Both clinical reports and research trials demonstrate that they support healthy joint function. Supplements such as glucosamine sulfate and chondroitin sulfate may actually help restore damaged tissue structure in joints, perhaps because these two substances are natural components of healthy cartilage.

MSM

Methylsulfonylmethane, also known as MSM, is often sold in combination with glucosamine and chondroitin. MSM is often promoted as a source of sulfur for the body, a component of many of the proteins in the body including muscle and joints. Studies have found that use of MSM can help reduce pain and improve physical functioning without any adverse reactions in people with arthritis and other joint pain. MSM is a more controversial supplement than glucosamine and chondroitin which tend to be fairly well accepted for use in joint pain.

Other Supplements

The following are supplements that are used in alternative medicine but not as well accepted by the scientific and medical community.

Ginkgo Biloba

Ginkgo biloba comes from dried leaves of the ginkgo tree. It is often used for insufficient blood flow, low circulation, mental fuzziness, and symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, memory loss, vertigo, tinnitus or ringing in ears. It is most often used in a capsule. Consistent large doses may lead to diarrhea, nausea or vomiting, which can be remedied by decreasing the cutting back. Ginkgo may have an additive anticoagulant effect when taken at the same time as aspirin, coumadin or other blood-thinning drugs or supplements.

Panax Ginseng

Ginseng comes from the root of the ginseng plant. It has been prescribed for aging, stress, memory, improved quality of life, and physical stamina. There are not enough scientific studies to prove that ginseng works in the way it is recommended.

Garlic

Garlic has been used for the common cold, sore throat, ear infections in children, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, fungal or yeast infections, chronic or recurrent infections, low resistance to infection; it is a natural antibiotic and antiviral agent. It is available in fresh, dried, powdered, tablets or capsules. Many preparations have attempted to isolate specific compounds that are responsible for garlic's reported health benefits with little success. Raw garlic appears to have health benefits that may relate to a combination of compounds in their natural state. Some recommend taking small whole garlic cloves to prevent bad breath.