

Supplements for Older Adults

If you are between the ages of 50 and 70 and want to maximize your health, follow these vitamin and mineral recommendations from nutrition expert Jane Pentz, PhD, owner of Lifestyle Management Associates in West Roxbury, Massachusetts. Of course, it is important to check with your doctor as this information addresses the “average” person and you may have special needs. To learn which foods contain the suggested supplements, visit EatRight.org.

1 Get Sufficient Calcium. Calcium helps prevent osteoporosis. The optimum amount of calcium intake is 1,000 milligrams (mg) per day for men, premenopausal women and postmenopausal women taking hormone replacement therapy. Women *not* on hormone replacement therapy are advised to take 1,500 mg of calcium per day. While calcium is more bio-available in food than in supplements, if you take a supplement, choose one that contains vitamin D, and spread intake over the day for easier absorption.

2 Help Calcium With Vitamin D. Many older adults don't get sufficient vitamin D, which is needed to maintain calcium absorption and skeletal integrity. Insufficient vitamin D can increase the risk of accelerated bone loss associated with aging. As you age, your skin slowly loses its ability to synthesize vitamin D from sunlight and you also absorb less from foods. The U.S. Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine recommends 400 international units (IU) of vitamin D daily.

3 Take Vitamin B for Your Heart. The risk for heart disease increases as you age. Lower your risk by getting enough folate and vitamins B₆ and B₁₂. Dozens of studies indicate that these B vitamins can help prevent heart attacks and stroke.

4 Fill Up on Folate. Folate is a natural substance in food. Obtaining the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) of 200 micrograms (mcg) for men and 180 mcg for women is critical. Raising folate intake to 400 mcg appears to be a safe and wise choice. You can obtain folate through supplements that contain folic acid, the synthetic form of folate.

5 Consume Vitamins B₆ and B₁₂. Older adults are vulnerable to vitamin B₆ deficiency due to age-related problems with metabolism. Currently, the RDA for vitamin B₆ is 1.6 mg for women and 2 mg for men. Although the requirements for this age group may need to be increased, no new RDAs have been set. Obtaining enough vitamin B₁₂ from foods may also be a problem for older adults because of age-related problems such as atrophic gastritis in which decreased stomach acid hinders the body's ability to absorb the vitamin from the protein in meat, poultry or fish. Because the supplement form of B₁₂, on the other hand, is easily absorbed, taking 25 mcg can help avoid deficiency.

6 Eat Fruits and Vegetables. Eating enough fruits and vegetables is important because they contain antioxidants that can help protect cells from damaging free radicals. If you follow the U.S.

National Cancer Institute's advice and eat at least five to nine servings a day of a variety of these foods, you will probably obtain enough antioxidants. However, it is safe to supplement your foods with the following amounts of vitamin C and beta-carotene.

7 Supplement With Vitamin C. Research has shown that vitamin C may lower the risk of developing cataracts, help lower blood pressure and cholesterol and help prevent stroke and heart attacks. While the RDA guidelines are a conservative 75 mg, taking 200 to 400 mg daily appears to be safe.

8 Consume Vitamin E. Vitamin E helps protect the lungs. The RDA is 15 mg, which is equivalent to 22 IU of natural-source vitamin E or 33 IU of the synthetic form.

9 Get Sufficient Beta-Carotene. Beta-carotene may help prevent vision-related problems in older adults. Beta-carotene is best obtained from foods, but if you take it in supplement form, consume no more than 15,000 IU.

10 Take Enough Selenium. Selenium is a mineral that functions like an antioxidant. Like vitamin E, it helps prevent oxidation of cell membranes. A safe intake is 100 to 200 mcg.

