

Debunking the top 7 supplement myths

Myth /miTH/ *noun*: a widely held but false belief or idea [Webster's Unabridged Dictionary]

Myths abound about supplements, so let's tackle some of the most common with a Recommended Daily Allowance of the facts.

1) If you eat a healthy diet, you don't need to take supplements. This presupposes that attainment of "a healthy diet" is simple. But very few of us take the time to access all the vital nutrients we need, in correct proportions, all of the time.



Besides, much of our food supply is processed and adulterated, grown in soil bereft of critical nutrients. Additionally, we live in unnatural, polluted environments that place unprecedented stresses on our bodies.

Not to mention the fact that because of genetic individuality, some of us require higher levels of specific nutrients to support vulnerable metabolic pathways in our bodies. And finally, due to specific medical conditions or just plain aging, our need for critical micronutrients can dramatically escalate.

2) Taking supplements gives people a false sense of security to engage in unhealthy lifestyles. This frequently invoked shibboleth couldn't be more wrong. It's exceedingly rare that I encounter a smoking, drinking, sedentary, junk food-consuming blob who conscientiously ingests handfuls of supplements. On the contrary, supplement takers on the whole are careful to apply sound lifestyle principles to their overall health plans.

3) If supplements were so great, mainstream doctors would recommend them. I know all too well, from my years of medical training, that M.D.s are inculcated early in their medical training with an anti-supplement, pro-drug bias.

"Is it FDA approved?" doctors ask. If not, it doesn't bear the imprimatur of officially sanctioned medicine. But the FDA's arduous approval process is skewed toward expensive, profitable, patentable, synthetic compounds, not naturally derived products. Hence, "Catch-22": As long as you make no health claims about a supplement, it's under the radar of the FDA, and it's OK to market it—but isn't the idea that it is a boon to your health the reason you are taking it? Not to mention that, despite the fact that few doctors recommend supplements to their patients, surveys show that most doctors take supplements themselves and recommend them to their families—a clear double standard.

4) The supplement industry is unregulated. Power-grabbing bureaucrats and their compliant allies in Congress, state legislatures, the mainstream media, Big Pharma and the medical establishment would like you to believe that. They're anxious to exert ever-greater levels of command and control over an industry that they see as having too much autonomy. They would like to see supplements regulated as stringently as drugs.

Lest you think that last statement is unduly alarmist, check out this recent Action Alert from the Alliance for Natural Health (ANH-USA), an organization on whose board I'm proud to serve: [Latest FDA Moves Could Stop Further Research on Supplements](#).

But the fact is, supplements are subject to a wide range of regulations, some already very onerous. In rare instances where supplements are found to be dangerous,

harmful or adulterated, they are rapidly subject to seizure and confiscation under existing federal and state statutes.

5) Supplements are dangerous. A steady drumbeat of propaganda aims to convince consumers and health professionals that supplements pose significant dangers. I've looked at some of the "studies," and they're generally cherry-picked to include the most edgy sports supplements or the most obscure Chinese herbal concoctions. The vast majority of supplements made by responsible manufacturers are safe and pure. Estimates that "thousands" of incidents of sickness or death occur each year are vastly inflated. Biased researchers often gleefully report that, when patients are dosed with multiple drugs for serious medical conditions while taking supplements, bad things can happen; supplements are inevitably blamed when the more likely culprits are the witches' brew of meds these patients are on.

Of course, you can't take supplements willy-nilly, especially if you have complex health problems. That's why we medical nutritionists are here to advise you on the safest, most rational choices.

6) "Stop all your supplements!" This is advice patients often hear from their doctors when they're scheduled for surgery or being prepped for cancer chemotherapy or radiation. This irrational blanket statement is shorthand for "I haven't done my homework on which vitamins and supplements are compatible with [surgery/chemo/radiation], so just in case there might be a conflict, just stop taking *everything*."

Unfortunately, this misinformed stance denies patients access to critical supplements at precisely the time they need them most—when they're subject to the stress and immunosuppression associated with aggressive, invasive medical interventions.

Admittedly, there are in fact some supplements that should be avoided depending on the circumstances (e.g., **certain nutrients that could promote excessive bleeding in surgery**, vitamins and botanicals that block chemo, or antioxidants that may blunt radiation), but medical nutritionists (who *have* done their homework!) can advise patients on which supplements to omit, and which to augment to counter side effects and bolster resistance.

7) "Natural" supplements are better than "synthetic." Let's introduce a little scientific literacy here. All supplements are, to a certain extent, processed to concentrate their active constituents. Even something as natural as green tea is carefully dried, aged and fermented to highlight its healthy catechins and L-theanine.

Some companies seek to distinguish themselves in the crowded marketplace by bragging that their nutrients are "natural"—usually meaning yeast-derived, which by the way isn't great for people with yeast allergies. From a biochemistry standpoint, the vitamin C synthesized in a huge vat at an industrial factory is identical to vitamin C, say, hand-pressed by Peruvian mountain highlanders from wild acerola berries. "Natural" conveys an aura of romance, and marketing hype exploits this irrational preference.

Besides, "all-natural" supplements are typically pricier and of lower potency than their synthetic equivalents. There are, of course exceptions: I prefer natural, mixed carotenoids to synthetic beta carotene, and mixed tocopherols and tocotrienols to synthetic E (d-alpha tocopheryl acetate, or d-alpha tocopheryl succinate). Otherwise, there is little difference between natural and synthetic forms of most

vitamins.