

What's the scoop? Questions and answers about dietary supplements

National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS) sent this bulletin at 09/07/2022 11:00 AM EDT

[View as a webpage](#) / [Share](#)



Fall 2022

What's the scoop? Questions and answers about dietary supplements

My teenaged daughter drinks milk occasionally, but not every day. How much milk does she need to get enough calcium?



Teenagers should get 1,300 milligrams (mg) of calcium a day for good health. There are about 300 mg of calcium in 1 cup of milk, so your daughter would need to drink about 4 cups of milk to get the daily recommended amount.

But of course, this assumes that milk is your daughter's only source of calcium. Your daughter will also get calcium from other foods and beverages, including cheese, yogurt, calcium-fortified cereals and juices, and some beans and vegetables, such as soybeans, spinach, and kale.

Nevertheless, many teenaged boys and girls do not get enough calcium. The same is true for many women after menopause and people who avoid dairy products. In these cases, a calcium supplement might help, but please talk with your healthcare provider for advice.

Have more questions? See our [fact sheet on calcium](#).

I eat a lot of carrots and I know that they have beta-carotene. I have read that beta-carotene increases your risk of lung cancer. Is that true?

High doses of beta-carotene from *supplements* do raise the risk of lung cancer in some people, but beta-carotene from *foods* like carrots does not. So, eat as many carrots—and other vegetables and fruits—as you want. They are very healthy, packed with nutrients, and might help reduce your risk of some chronic diseases.

The link between lung cancer and beta-carotene supplements (a form of vitamin A) comes from a few large studies. These studies found that people who smoke, used to smoke, or who work with asbestos had a higher risk of lung cancer when they took dietary supplements containing 20 to 30 mg per day of beta-carotene for several years.



These doses are very high. Typical amounts of beta-carotene in most dietary supplements, such as multivitamins, are much lower and are not linked to an increased risk of lung cancer. For example, a supplement might contain 1 mg (written as 1,000 micrograms [mcg]) of vitamin A, with about 1/3 as beta-carotene, but check product labels.

Have more questions? See our [fact sheet on vitamin A and carotenoids](#).

In the News

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) releases report on multivitamins, cardiovascular disease, and cancer



The USPSTF, an independent group of medical experts, recently released a report [on vitamin, mineral, and multivitamin supplements to prevent cardiovascular disease and cancer](#). They concluded that there is not enough evidence to determine if multivitamins reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease or cancer. In addition, the USPSTF recommended **against** taking beta-carotene supplements to prevent cardiovascular disease or cancer because the harms of these supplements outweigh any benefits. The USPSTF also recommended **against** taking vitamin E supplements to prevent these diseases because research clearly shows that these supplements do not help.

However, some of the nutrients found in multivitamins might benefit certain people. Prenatal multivitamins, for example, can help people get adequate amounts of critical nutrients, such as iron and folic acid, during pregnancy. Taking [folic acid](#) before becoming pregnant and during early pregnancy helps prevent birth defects of the brain and spinal cord known as neural tube defects. Many older adults and people who follow a vegan diet might benefit from the [vitamin B12](#) in multivitamins. Likewise, certain vitamins and minerals are recommended for some infants and toddlers. For example, [vitamin D](#) is recommended for infants who are breastfed and [iron](#) is recommended for infants who were born prematurely and older infants who are not getting enough iron from the foods they eat.

For more information, see our [fact sheet on multivitamins](#).



NIH study confirms benefit of supplements for slowing age-related macular degeneration (AMD)

A series of studies called the Age-Related Eye Disease Studies (AREDS) conducted over the last 2 decades found that certain dietary supplements help slow the rate of vision loss in people with AMD who are at high risk of developing advanced AMD. AMD is the most common cause of vision loss in older people.

The original AREDS supplement contained 500 mg of vitamin C, 400 international units (IU) of vitamin E, 80 mg of zinc, 2 mg of copper, and 15 mg of beta-carotene. Because high doses of beta-carotene supplements have been shown to increase the risk of lung cancer in some people, researchers also tested an AREDS supplement called AREDS2 that contains the carotenoids lutein and zeaxanthin instead of beta-carotene. Based on 10 years of data, [NIH reported](#) that the AREDS2 supplement reduces the risk of progression to advanced AMD even more, and eliminates the increased risk of lung cancer from the beta-carotene.

For more information, see our [fact sheet on vitamin A and carotenoids](#).



¿Habla español?

Consulte [nuestra información basada en la ciencia](#) para ayudarle a tomar las mejores decisiones para su salud con respecto al uso de suplementos dietéticos.

Have more questions about dietary supplements? Ask the Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS).



Send your questions about dietary supplements to ODS: ods.od.nih.gov/contact.



[Like us today](#)
on Facebook



[Follow our tweets](#)
at @NIH_ODS



[Connect with us](#)
on LinkedIn

About ODS

The [Office of Dietary Supplements \(ODS\)](#) is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the nation's medical research agency—supporting scientific studies that turn discovery into health.

Contact Us

Office of Dietary Supplements
National Institutes of Health
6705 Rockledge Drive (Rockledge I)
Room 730, MSC 7991
Bethesda, MD 20817

Email: ods@nih.gov

Website: <https://ods.od.nih.gov>

Subscribe to updates from National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Dietary Supplements (ODS)

Email Address

e.g. [name@example.com](#)

[SUBSCRIBE](#)

Share Bulletin



POWERED BY



[Privacy Policy](#) | [Cookie Statement](#) | [Help](#)