



Supplements: What to Know

It seems as though every year brings news of a new herb or supplement that could be the “next big thing” in improving health or longevity. There are thousands of supplements available, including ashwagandha, garlic, fish oil, collagen, and St. John’s wort. These substances may help some people, but their effects vary widely. Supplements are meant to help enhance your diet, not replace it. Continue reading to learn more about supplements and how to use them appropriately.



A History of Supplements/Supplemental Therapies

- ⇒ 3300 BC: Ayurveda practices begin in India, combining the practices of yoga, meditation, herbalism and astrology
- ⇒ 400 BC: Hippocrates states: “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food”
- ⇒ 200 AD: Greek physician Galen creates a system to pair common illnesses with their herbal remedies
- ⇒ 1100-1200 AD: herbal medicines gain popularity in Arabic and European countries
- ⇒ 1800-1900 AD: pharmaceutical medications developed and the popularity of herbal remedies declines
- ⇒ 1989: US Congress creates the NIH Office of Alternative Medicine
- ⇒ 1994: herbs classified as dietary supplements by the FDA; NIH Office of Dietary Supplements created

Omega-3 Fatty Acids/Fish Oil:

- ⇒ Thought to block production of cytokines (chemical messengers that increase inflammation)
- ⇒ Found in fish, nuts, avocados
- ⇒ Supplementation may benefit people who rarely eat fish



Vitamin D:

- ⇒ May interfere with pathways that promote inflammation
- ⇒ May help with autoimmune conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, psoriasis and lupus
- ⇒ Found in fish, dairy products, egg yolks, mushrooms

Curcumin:

- ⇒ Thought to interfere with inflammatory pathways
- ⇒ Found in turmeric
- ⇒ Some commercial turmeric and curcumin powders may contain lead



Glucosamine:

- ⇒ A naturally-occurring component of cartilage
- ⇒ May help to relieve the pain of osteoarthritis
- ⇒ Commonly sold with chondroitin (another component of cartilage)

Collagen:

- ⇒ A form of protein that the body makes from amino acids that come from food
- ⇒ Provides structure; found in skin, cartilage, tendons
- ⇒ Sold in powder or pill form
- ⇒ Thought to help with anti-aging, but no conclusive evidence



St. John's Wort:

- ⇒ An herb that has been used in traditional Greek, Islamic and Chinese medicines for centuries
- ⇒ Thought to help treat mild depression and menopause symptoms
- ⇒ Can interact with many medications (heart meds, birth control, warfarin, some cancer drugs)



Garlic:

- ⇒ One of the most studied supplements, but very little research is conclusive
- ⇒ May be beneficial in lowering cholesterol, controlling blood sugar and blood pressure



Ashwagandha:

- ⇒ A root that has been used in traditional Indian medicine
- ⇒ May be helpful in stress relief, sleep improvement, and anxiety reduction

Bottom Line

- ⇒ Research is mostly funded by supplement manufacturers, so not as reliable as independent researchers
- ⇒ Supplements are not regulated by the FDA for safety or efficacy
- ⇒ For more information on supplements, the NIH ODS has fact sheets available at <https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/list-all/>
- ⇒ Formulations can differ batch to batch
- ⇒ If you eat a balanced diet, you probably do not need supplements
- ⇒ Supplements can interfere with many prescribed medications, so please check with your doctor if you are interested in trying one
- ⇒ When shopping for supplements, look for independent certification from either **NSF** or the **US Pharmacopeia**



Resources: <https://www.jlr.org/article/S0022-2275%2823%2900166-9/fulltext>

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/three-anti-inflammatory-supplements-can-really-fight-disease-according-to/>; <https://nutritionsource.hsph.harvard.edu/collagen/>

<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/st-johns-wort>; <https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/garlic>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/start-vetting-your-supplements>

**Consumer-centered access for
long-term care information,
referrals and assessments.**

**For information,
call 518-382-8481, #9, ext. 304**



Do you have questions or concerns about what to eat?

If you are participating in services offered by Schenectady County's Senior and Long Term Care services, you are eligible for a free consultation with Debbie Griswold, Registered Dietitian.

Call Cornell Cooperative Extension, Schenectady County at 518-372-1622, ext. 269 to contact or leave a message.

Check out our website for nutrition resources: <http://ccschenectady.org/nutrition-for-seniors>

Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services denies no person services or access to service based upon race, color, sex, religion, national origin, marital status and/or handicapping conditions. Schenectady County Department of Senior and Long Term Care Services is primarily funded with County tax dollars. Supplemental funding is through the New York State Office for the Aging under Title III-B/D, III-C-1, III-C-2, III-F of the Federal Older Americans Act, and New York State Expanded In-Home Services for the Elderly (EISEP), Community Services for the Elderly Act (CSE), Congregate Services Initiative (CSI), and the Wellness In Nutrition (WIN).

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