

Should we take supplement vitamins without a prescription?

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What?

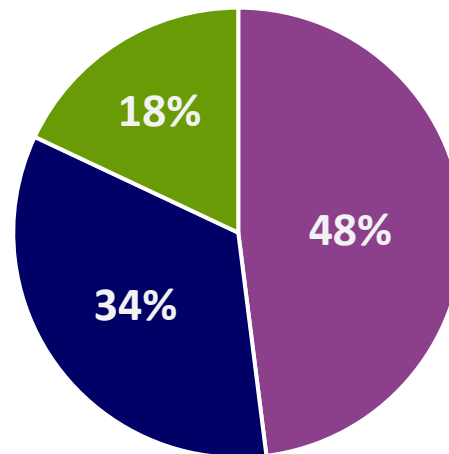
Globally, the most common dietary supplements are **vitamins and minerals**. These supplements can be used to maintain adequate intake or to treat nutritional deficiencies. However, they are available without prescription, and so are mostly taken by people without clinical evidence of insufficiency.¹

Who?

The prevalence of supplement use varies greatly with country¹. The **USA shows particularly high use**, and here it correlates positively with age, education, socioeconomic status, healthy lifestyles, and is more common in women.²

In a 2018 survey of 2081 **UK** adults, **almost half reported currently taking food supplements**, while less than a fifth had never done so. The most common supplements reported were **multivitamins, followed by fish oils, and vitamin D**.³

Do you ever take/have you ever taken food supplements or vitamins?



- I currently take food supplements or vitamins on a regular basis
- I have previously taken food supplements or vitamins, but no longer do
- I have never taken food supplements or vitamins

Why?

An umbrella review found no evidence of an effect on all-cause or cardiovascular mortality from 24 common supplements and dietary interventions. They report low-certainty evidence for a **reduced risk of coronary heart disease and heart attack** from omega-3 LC-PUFA supplementation. Folic acid was associated with a **decrease in stroke risk** with low-certainty evidence, while a combination of calcium and vitamin D was associated with an **increase in risk of stroke** with moderate-certainty.²

Author Comments

Dietary supplementation is particularly common in high-income countries, where micronutrient deficiency is less common.¹ At best, **much of this supplementation may be unnecessary**. Therefore, **consultation with a medical professional** may be sensible before taking vitamins or food supplements.

References

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