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SIMPLE HEALTHY LIVING GUIDE

Less Medicine. More Prevention. Real Food. Healthy Habits.



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This guide is intended for educational and informational purposes only.

The information provided is not medical advice and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical evaluation, diagnosis, treatment, or recommendations from your physician, pediatrician, or another qualified healthcare professional.

Every child and every adult has unique nutritional needs, medical conditions, health history, lifestyle factors, and personal circumstances. **For this reason, always consult your physician, pediatrician, or another qualified healthcare professional before making significant changes to your diet, lifestyle, or supplement routine, especially for children, pregnant or breastfeeding women, individuals with chronic health conditions, or those taking prescription medications.**

The information presented in this guide is based on the best available scientific evidence at the time of publication, together with my professional education, training, and personal experience. It is intended as general educational guidance and should not be interpreted as individualized medical or nutritional advice. Recommendations related to nutrition, lifestyle, and supplements should always be considered within the context of your own health needs and discussed with your healthcare provider when appropriate.

Individual results may vary depending on age, health status, genetics, medications, lifestyle, and many other individual factors. Because nutrition science is constantly evolving, recommendations may change as new high-quality evidence becomes available.

References and source links are provided throughout this guide for readers who wish to explore the research in greater detail. I encourage you to continue learning, ask questions, and work together with your healthcare provider to determine what is most appropriate for you and your family.

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Welcome

First of all, thank you for trusting me.

If you're reading this guide, you're probably looking to learn more about nutrition, health, and the everyday habits that can make a real difference in your life. Whether your goal is to lose weight, improve your eating habits, have more energy, support your overall health, or simply build healthier routines, I'm glad you're here.

This guide wasn't created to offer another diet or a quick fix. Instead, my goal is to help you understand the fundamentals of healthy eating and a balanced lifestyle so you can make informed decisions with confidence every day.

Inside, you'll find easy-to-understand explanations, practical tips, nutrition guidance, healthy lifestyle recommendations, and evidence-based information about dietary supplements — when they may be helpful — as well as answers to many of the most common questions and misconceptions people have about them.

***There is no such thing as a perfect diet or a perfect lifestyle.
What truly makes a difference are the small, consistent choices we make every single day.***

A Personal Note

As a Wellness Specialist and a Certified Pediatric Nutrition Professional and Sports Nutrition Coach, I continue to learn every day how profoundly nutrition, quality sleep, physical activity, and healthy habits can influence our health and overall quality of life.

But if I'm being honest, life and my family have taught me even more than any course or certification ever could. After my two pregnancies, I realized that theory is one thing, but everyday life is often something entirely different.

And the truth is, life doesn't always go according to plan. Some days everything flows smoothly, while on others, work, family, exhaustion, or unexpected challenges completely throw us off our routine. **It was during those moments that I realized the goal isn't to be perfect — it's to find a balance we can always come back to.**

Over time, I learned to pause, take a deep breath, be kinder to myself, and accept that I don't have to do everything perfectly. What matters most is that we keep coming back to the habits that support our health — without guilt and without giving up.

I truly believe that life is one continuous learning experience. Every challenge, every mistake, and every stage of life has something valuable to teach us if we're willing to learn from it.

My hope is that this guide will help you feel more confident when making decisions about nutrition, health, and your everyday habits — and remind you that small, consistent changes often have the greatest impact on our long-term health.

Dragana Valuh

My Philosophy

I believe that healthy living shouldn't be complicated, restrictive, or make you feel guilty.

I don't believe in crash diets, strict food rules, calorie counting (unless you're pursuing specific athletic or professional goals), or quick fixes. I believe in small, sustainable changes that fit into everyday life and gradually become healthy habits.

My goal isn't to tell you what you "have to" eat or hand you a meal plan you'll follow for a few weeks. My goal is to help you understand how your body works, why certain habits matter, and how to make choices that will support your health for years to come.

Food is one of the most powerful tools we have for protecting and improving our health.

It provides our bodies with energy, but also with the nutrients needed for our brain, muscles, hormones, digestive system, and immune system to function properly every day. That's why I don't look at food simply as calories — I look at the quality of the foods we choose day after day.

At the same time, health is about much more than what's on your plate. Quality sleep, regular movement, stress management, proper hydration, and everyday lifestyle habits are all essential pieces of the bigger picture.

Dietary supplements can be a valuable source of support when there's a genuine need for them and they're chosen thoughtfully. However, they should never replace a nutritious diet and healthy lifestyle habits. The best results are always built on a strong foundation.

We are not striving for perfection. We are striving for balance, consistency, and habits you can maintain for years to come.



Small Habits That Can Make a Big Difference

Plan Your Grocery Shopping Ahead

Whenever possible, try not to go grocery shopping when you're hungry or without a shopping list. Planning just a few meals ahead of time and making a shopping list can help you make healthier choices and avoid impulse purchases. You don't have to plan an entire week's worth of meals — sometimes planning just a few meals for the next couple of days can make a big difference.

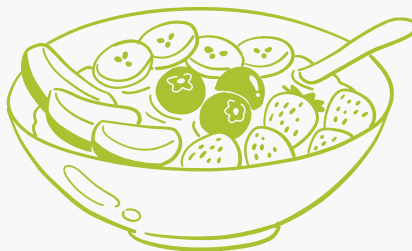


Try to Keep a Consistent Meal Schedule

Life isn't always predictable — work, kids, unexpected responsibilities, and last-minute changes happen. Whenever you can, try to eat around the same times each day. Our bodies thrive on routine, and a more consistent eating schedule may help support steady energy levels and better appetite regulation. And if one day doesn't go as planned, don't give up — your next meal is always a new opportunity to get back on track.

Don't Skip Breakfast Just Because You're Busy

When breakfast includes enough protein, fiber, and healthy fats, it often provides longer-lasting fullness and more stable energy throughout the morning. It doesn't have to be complicated — the simplest breakfasts are often the ones we come back to again and again. Even if you only have ten minutes, a simple, balanced breakfast is usually a much better choice than skipping it altogether.



Don't Forget to Stay Hydrated

Water plays a role in nearly every process in the body — from regulating body temperature and supporting digestion to maintaining concentration, energy levels, and physical performance. Try to make water your first choice throughout the day, and don't wait until you're extremely thirsty to drink. Sometimes something as simple as keeping a water bottle with you is the easiest way to stay hydrated.



Prep a Few Foods Ahead of Time

Not every meal needs to be planned down to the smallest detail. On Sundays, I often spend a little time preparing a few basics for the week ahead — boiling eggs, cooking chicken, chopping vegetables, or making a pot of soup. During busy weekdays, that small investment of time makes it much easier to put together a quick, nutritious meal, even when I'm tired. You don't need to prep every meal for the entire week — preparing just a few ingredients ahead of time can make healthy eating much easier.



Prioritize Quality Sleep

No matter how much attention we pay to nutrition, we shouldn't forget that quality sleep is one of the foundations of good health. While we sleep, our bodies recover, regulate hormones, support immune function, and restore energy for the day ahead. When we don't get enough sleep, we're often more tired, hungrier, and less likely to make the food choices we'd like to make. Whenever possible, try to make sleep a priority, just like healthy eating.



Find Ways to Move More



Physical activity doesn't have to mean spending hours in the gym. A family walk, playing with your kids, riding a bike, swimming, or even a few minutes of stretching are all valuable forms of movement. The best exercise is the one you genuinely enjoy and can stick with over time. Start with what's realistic and available to you today — small steps, repeated consistently, can make a remarkable difference.

Be Kind to Yourself

We all go through seasons when life feels overwhelming. During those times, try not to be too hard on yourself. One meal, one day, or even one week won't erase all the progress you've made. What matters most is getting back to your healthy habits when you're ready. Consistency — not perfection — is what truly makes the biggest difference.

Leave Room for Life

Healthy eating doesn't mean you'll never enjoy a slice of cake, celebrate a birthday, or share your favorite meal with family and friends. The goal is to make choices that support your health most of the time while still leaving room for special occasions and the moments that make life meaningful. In the end, the goal isn't to live by strict rules — it's to build a way of eating and living that supports your health while still leaving plenty of room for family, friends, travel, celebrations, and all the little moments that make life beautiful.

Understanding Food a Little Better

Each macronutrient — protein, carbohydrates, and fats — has a unique role in the body, and we need all of them to function properly.

The goal isn't to eliminate an entire food group — it's to learn how to create balance.

Once we understand the role each nutrient plays, making balanced food choices becomes much easier.

In addition to macronutrients, fiber deserves special attention. Although it isn't considered a macronutrient, it plays an essential role in digestive health, blood sugar regulation, satiety, and maintaining a healthy gut microbiome.



Protein

Protein is the building block of our bodies. It is essential for building and maintaining muscle, repairing tissues, supporting immune function, and helping us stay full longer. Getting enough protein becomes even more important as we age because we naturally begin to lose muscle mass over time.



Carbohydrates

Carbohydrates are the body's primary source of energy, especially for the brain and muscles. Instead of avoiding carbohydrates, it's much more important to choose high-quality, minimally processed sources that are rich in fiber. Don't be afraid of foods like potatoes, rice, or bananas — no single food determines whether we gain or lose weight. What matters far more is the overall quality of our diet and the habits we build over time.

Healthy Fats

Healthy fats are essential for every cell in our body. They support hormone production, brain and nervous system function, and the absorption of vitamins A, D, E, and K. They also help keep us feeling full and are an important part of a balanced diet.

Fiber

Fiber supports digestive health, nourishes the beneficial bacteria in our gut, helps us stay full longer, and promotes more stable blood sugar levels. Unfortunately, most people don't get enough fiber, which is why it's important to include vegetables, fruit, legumes, and whole grains every day.

Fermented Foods

Fermented foods can also be a valuable part of a healthy, balanced diet.

Foods such as kefir, yogurt with live cultures, sauerkraut, kimchi, and miso naturally contain beneficial microorganisms that can help support a healthy gut microbiome.

Although they are not necessary for everyone, regularly including a variety of fermented foods can be a simple way to support gut health as part of an overall healthy eating pattern.



How to Build a Balanced Meal

Building a balanced meal doesn't have to be complicated or involve counting calories. Once you understand a few basic principles, it becomes much easier to create meals that keep you satisfied, provide lasting energy, and give your body the nutrients it needs.

Whenever possible, try to include: a quality source of protein, a quality source of carbohydrates, a source of healthy fats, and vegetables whenever possible.

Below you'll find a variety of foods you can mix and match when building your meals. Think of this list as inspiration — not as a set of rules.

Protein Sources

Meat & Poultry: Chicken, Turkey, Beef, Veal, Pork loin

Fish & Seafood: Salmon, Trout, Tuna, Cod, Sardines, Shrimp

Eggs & Dairy: Eggs, Greek yogurt, Skyr, Cottage cheese, Kefir

Plant-Based: Tofu, Tempeh, Edamame, Beans, Lentils, Chickpeas



Quality Carbohydrates

Oats, Rice, Quinoa, Buckwheat, Whole wheat pasta, Whole grain bread, Sourdough bread, Potatoes, Sweet potatoes, Corn, Fruit



Fruit Is Not the Enemy!

Don't be afraid of fruit. It naturally contains carbohydrates, but it also provides fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants that support overall health. For most people, fruit is an important part of a balanced diet.



Healthy Fats

Extra virgin olive oil, Avocado, Olives, Nuts, Nut butter, Chia seeds, Flaxseeds, Pumpkin seeds, Sesame seeds



Vegetables

Leafy greens (spinach, lettuce, arugula), Broccoli, Cauliflower, Cabbage, Bell peppers, Tomatoes, Cucumbers, Zucchini, Carrots, Celery, Onions, Mushrooms, Asparagus, Green peas, Radishes, Beets



Don't look for the "perfect" food — focus on balance.

Don't think of foods as "good" or "bad." Instead, think about balance, variety, and habits you can maintain for years to come. That's the foundation of healthy, sustainable eating.



Build your meals with a variety of real, whole foods from each food group—and let balance, not perfection, guide your choices.

What This Looks Like in Our Family

When people ask me what healthy eating looks like in our home, my answer is actually very simple — we try to eat well most of the time, without pressure and without striving for perfection.

Breakfast has always been an important part of our day. On school days, our girls don't leave the house without breakfast — not because I believe everyone has to eat first thing in the morning, but because it's a routine that works well for our family and helps all of us feel our best.

Our other meals aren't complicated either. Most of our lunches include a quality source of protein, plenty of vegetables, and carbohydrates adjusted to our needs that day. Dinner is usually simple, nourishing, and satisfying, but we don't stress about rigid rules.

I also believe healthy eating should leave room for life. We enjoy going out to lunch or dinner with family and friends, sharing foods that may not be "perfect," and enjoying a glass of wine from time to time. I don't believe one meal can undo all the healthy habits we've built. In fact, those moments are part of what makes life meaningful.

When healthy habits become part of your everyday life, it's much easier to enjoy special occasions without guilt.



A Few Favorites From Our Family Kitchen

These aren't recipes or strict meal plans—just some of the foods and simple meal ideas that have become part of our family's everyday life. Every family is different, but I hope you'll find a few ideas that inspire your own.

Breakfast

Breakfast in our home usually revolves around eggs—boiled, scrambled or fried. We almost always have cottage cheese, avocado, sour cream, pumpkin seeds, walnuts, cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, and fresh sourdough bread on hand. We also enjoy prosciutto or another quality source of protein, depending on the day. My husband and younger daughter love having kefir with breakfast, while I usually keep it simple with a cup of tea.

Another favorite is Greek yogurt with chia seeds, hemp seeds, and fresh fruit. It's one of my go-to breakfasts on busy mornings.

Lunch

Lunch is usually built around a quality source of protein. Some days it's chicken prepared in different ways, while other days we enjoy salmon, which is on our menu two or three times a week. We also enjoy homemade beef and turkey meatballs, as well as steak, which are regular favorites in our home.

We usually pair our meals with sweet potatoes or regular potatoes, grilled vegetables, and there is almost always a fresh salad or some type of fermented foods on the table.

Dinner

Dinner is usually simple, nourishing, and flexible. Some of our family favorites include black bean tacos, tofu sandwiches with vegetables, chicken pasta with parmesan, polenta with cottage cheese (one of my girls' favorites), or large meal salads packed with vegetables and protein.

And yes—we're also happy to eat leftovers from lunch. I'm a big believer in reducing food waste, so I always try to use the ingredients we already have before preparing something new.

These are simply some of the meals that work well for our family. They aren't perfect, and we certainly don't eat like this every single day. Life gets busy, plans change, and sometimes dinner looks completely different than we expected—and that's perfectly okay.

Healthy eating isn't about perfection. It's about building simple habits that work for your family most of the time.



Small Nutrients, Big Impact

So far, we've talked about macronutrients — protein, carbohydrates, and fats — which provide our bodies with energy and form the foundation of a healthy diet. But for our bodies to use that energy efficiently and function properly, we also rely on micronutrients — vitamins and minerals that are involved in hundreds of processes throughout the body.

They support immune function, help convert food into energy, contribute to healthy bones, muscles, and the nervous system, assist in tissue repair, hormone production, and help virtually every organ in the body function as it should.

This is exactly why I've emphasized the importance of eating a variety of foods, filling your plate with different colors, and choosing minimally processed foods whenever possible. The more diverse your diet, the more likely you are to provide your body with everything it needs to thrive.

The good news is that most vitamins and minerals can be obtained through a balanced, nutrient-rich diet.

Dietary supplements can sometimes provide valuable support when they're truly needed, but they should never replace the strong foundation we build through our everyday food choices.

When Do Supplements Really Make Sense?

Today, there are countless dietary supplements on the market, and it's easy to get the impression that we need almost all of them. However, I firmly believe that supplements should never be the first step. The foundation of good health is always a balanced, nutrient-rich diet, quality sleep, regular physical activity, and other healthy lifestyle habits.

One of the most valuable pieces of advice I can offer is to talk with your healthcare provider and consider having routine blood work done from time to time. It's always better to make decisions based on your body's actual needs rather than choosing products blindly.

No supplement can replace a healthy diet.

Supplements can help fill nutritional gaps, but they can never replace the healthy habits we neglect every day.

Does Everyone Need Vitamin D?

Vitamin D plays a much bigger role than most people realize. It's best known for supporting bone health and helping the body absorb calcium, but it also supports normal muscle function, contributes to a healthy immune system, and is involved in hundreds of important processes throughout the body.

Our bodies can produce vitamin D when our skin is exposed to enough sunlight. However, spending most of our time indoors, regularly using sunscreen, the season of the year, where we live, our age, and even our natural skin color can all affect how much vitamin D our bodies are able to produce. That's one of the reasons vitamin D deficiency is so common worldwide.

Vitamin D is naturally found in only a handful of foods. The best dietary sources include fatty fish such as salmon, sardines, and mackerel, along with egg yolks and liver. Dairy products and plant-based milk alternatives provide vitamin D only when they have been fortified.

My Advice: Vitamin D is one of the few supplements frequently recommended by both physicians and nutrition professionals — when there's a valid reason. Whenever possible, have your vitamin D levels checked and discuss the results with your healthcare provider so any supplementation can be tailored to your individual needs.

Did You Know?

Vitamin D is unique because, although we call it a vitamin, it actually functions more like a hormone in the body. People with darker skin naturally have more melanin, which also reduces the skin's ability to produce vitamin D from sunlight — meaning they may have a higher risk of vitamin D deficiency.



References: ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminD-HealthProfessional/

Which Form of Magnesium Should You Choose?

Magnesium is one of the most important minerals for overall health and is involved in more than 300 biochemical processes throughout the body. It plays a key role in energy production, muscle and nerve function, blood sugar regulation, maintaining healthy blood pressure, and supporting bone health.

Some of the best natural sources of magnesium include dark leafy greens, nuts (especially almonds and cashews), seeds (pumpkin, chia, and sesame), legumes (beans, lentils, and chickpeas), whole grains, fish, bananas, and dark chocolate (70% cocoa or higher).

My Advice: If you ask me which form I recommend most often, my answer is usually magnesium glycinate, especially when the goal is to support the nervous system, promote relaxation, or improve sleep quality. The best form of magnesium depends on your individual needs, overall health, and the reason you're considering supplementation.

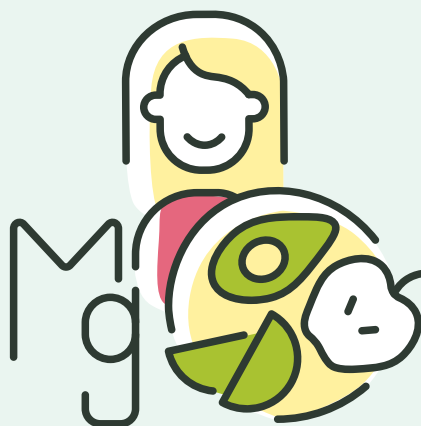
Did You Know? — Different Forms, Different Purposes

Magnesium glycinate — best for supporting relaxation, managing stress, and promoting better sleep. Well absorbed and gentle on the digestive system.

Magnesium citrate — commonly used to help relieve occasional constipation.

Magnesium malate — often chosen to support energy production and muscle function.

Magnesium oxide — less well absorbed and more likely to cause digestive discomfort.



References:

ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Magnesium-HealthProfessional

Should You Take Iron?

Iron is one of the most important minerals in the human body. It's essential for making hemoglobin, the protein in red blood cells that carries oxygen to every cell in the body. Iron also plays an important role in energy production, supports normal immune function, and contributes to healthy brain function.

Heme iron is found only in animal-based foods and is absorbed much more efficiently by the body. Excellent sources include red meat, liver, oysters, shellfish, sardines, and other types of fish. Non-heme iron is found primarily in plant foods such as beans, lentils, chickpeas, tofu, spinach, oats, whole grains, nuts, and seeds.

My Advice: Iron is not a supplement I recommend taking without a clear reason. Fatigue, low energy, dizziness, or hair loss can have many different causes and don't automatically mean you're iron deficient. If iron deficiency is suspected, the best first step is to talk with your healthcare provider and have the appropriate blood tests performed.

Did You Know?

One of the easiest ways to improve iron absorption is to include vitamin C-rich foods with your meal — bell peppers, lemons, oranges, kiwis, strawberries, and tomatoes can all help your body absorb more iron from plant-based foods. On the other hand, milk and dairy products, calcium supplements, coffee, and black tea can reduce iron absorption when consumed at the same time.



References:

ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Iron-HealthProfessional

Does Everyone Need Vitamin B12?

Vitamin B12 is one of the most important vitamins for overall health. It plays a vital role in maintaining a healthy nervous system, producing red blood cells, supporting DNA synthesis, and helping the body produce energy. It is also essential for the formation of myelin, the protective sheath that surrounds nerves and allows nerve signals to travel properly.

Vitamin B12 is found naturally almost exclusively in animal-based foods such as meat, fish, seafood, eggs, and dairy products. People who avoid or rarely eat these foods have a higher risk of developing a deficiency. In addition, older adults and people who take certain medications for long periods of time are also at increased risk.

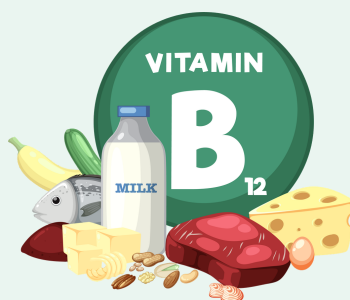
A vitamin B12 deficiency can lead to fatigue, weakness, pale skin, difficulty concentrating, numbness or tingling in the hands and feet, balance problems, memory difficulties, and mood changes.

My Advice: If you eat a balanced diet that regularly includes animal-based foods, there's a good chance you're getting enough vitamin B12. However, if you're vegan or vegetarian, over the age of 50, or take certain medications, it's worth talking with your healthcare provider about whether checking your vitamin B12 levels would be beneficial.

Did You Know?

Vitamin B12 is unique among all vitamins — it isn't produced by plants or animals, but by certain bacteria. When we eat animal-based foods, we're actually consuming the vitamin B12 that bacteria originally produced.

You may also wonder why B12 supplements often contain 500 mcg or even 1,000 mcg when daily requirements are much lower. The reason is that our bodies can absorb only a limited amount at one time — higher doses simply increase the likelihood that your body will absorb the amount it actually needs.



References:

pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29216732 · pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/27886704

Vitamin B9 — Folate, Folic Acid, or Methylfolate?

Vitamin B9 plays an important role in the production of new cells, DNA synthesis, red blood cell formation, healthy nervous system function, and the regulation of homocysteine — an amino acid associated with cardiovascular health.

Folate is the natural form of vitamin B9 found in foods such as leafy green vegetables, broccoli, asparagus, legumes, citrus fruits, avocados, egg yolks, and liver. Folic acid is the synthetic form used in dietary supplements and fortified foods. Methylfolate (L-5-MTHF) is the biologically active form that the body can use immediately without further conversion.

My Advice: For most people, the priority should be getting enough natural folate through a varied, balanced diet. Women who are planning to become pregnant shouldn't wait until they have a positive pregnancy test — current guidelines recommend taking 400 mcg of folic acid daily, beginning at least one month before conception and continuing throughout the first trimester. Don't choose a supplement just because it's popular on social media — for most people, folic acid is an excellent choice.

Did You Know?

In 1998, the United States introduced mandatory folic acid fortification of enriched flour and certain grain products to help prevent neural tube defects — serious birth defects affecting the brain and spinal cord. Since then, the number of babies born with these birth defects has declined significantly.



References:

ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Folate-HealthProfessional

uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org

Does Zinc Really Support the Immune System?

Yes — zinc is one of the most important minerals for a healthy immune system. However, its role extends far beyond immunity. Zinc is involved in hundreds of processes throughout the body — it's essential for normal growth and development, wound healing, protein and DNA synthesis, healthy immune function, and even our sense of taste and smell.

The best dietary sources of zinc include animal-based foods such as red meat, shellfish (especially oysters), pork, poultry, and dairy products. Zinc is also found in plant foods such as pumpkin seeds, legumes, nuts, whole grains, and oats, but is absorbed less efficiently from plant sources.

My Advice: Some studies suggest that certain forms of zinc, when taken within the first few days after cold symptoms begin, may help shorten the duration of the common cold. However, that doesn't mean zinc should be taken every day in high doses. Zinc supplementation should always be based on your individual needs and used when there's a clear reason to do so.

Did You Know?

Unlike iron, vitamin C does not increase zinc absorption. This is a common misconception, probably because zinc and vitamin C are often mentioned together when people talk about supporting the immune system.

Taking high doses of zinc for long periods of time can reduce copper levels, disrupt the balance of other minerals, and may even impair immune function.



References:

ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Zinc-HealthProfessional

[pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8543785](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8543785)

Is Milk the Only Good Source of Calcium?

Calcium is the most abundant mineral in the human body. It's best known for its role in building and maintaining strong bones and teeth, but it's also essential for normal muscle and nerve function, the release of certain hormones, and many other processes that take place throughout the body every day.

While milk and dairy products are excellent sources, calcium is also found in sardines with bones, calcium-set tofu, beans, sesame seeds, tahini, almonds, broccoli, kale and other cruciferous vegetables, as well as certain calcium-fortified plant-based beverages.

My Advice: When it comes to bone health, calcium isn't the only factor. Getting enough vitamin D helps your body absorb calcium, while regular physical activity — especially weight-bearing exercises such as walking, strength training, or climbing stairs — helps maintain strong bones. It's also worth remembering that calcium can interfere with the absorption of iron, zinc, and magnesium, so it's generally best to take these supplements at different times of the day.

Did You Know?

If you don't get enough calcium from your diet, your body will draw calcium from your bones to maintain normal muscle and nerve function. Over time, inadequate calcium intake may contribute to weaker bones.

Calcium from certain cruciferous vegetables, such as kale and broccoli, can actually be absorbed very efficiently — even better than calcium from cow's milk.



A Note for Women

Women, particularly after menopause, have a higher risk of developing osteoporosis due to the natural decline in estrogen levels. Getting enough calcium, maintaining adequate vitamin D levels, and staying physically active are all important for supporting bone health throughout life.

References:

bonehealthandosteoporosis.org

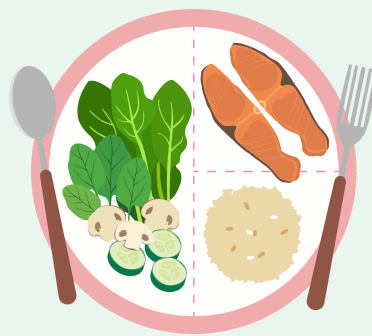
ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Calcium-HealthProfessional

Are Omega-3 Fatty Acids Really That Important?

Yes. Omega-3 fatty acids are among the most important healthy fats we obtain from food. They are important components of cell membranes, support normal brain, eye, and nervous system function, contribute to heart health, and help regulate inflammatory processes throughout the body.

The two most important omega-3 fatty acids are EPA and DHA, which are found primarily in fatty fish such as salmon, sardines, mackerel, and herring. Plant foods such as flaxseeds, chia seeds, and walnuts contain ALA, a form of omega-3 that the body can convert into EPA and DHA — however, this conversion is very limited.

My Advice: If you regularly eat fatty fish two to three times per week, you may not need an omega-3 supplement. However, if you rarely eat fish or avoid it altogether, a high-quality omega-3 supplement providing both EPA and DHA can be an excellent addition to your routine.



Did You Know?

Many people believe that eating flaxseeds or chia seeds alone is enough to meet their omega-3 needs. While these foods are excellent sources of ALA, our bodies convert only a small percentage of it into EPA and DHA — the forms directly used by the brain, eyes, and many other tissues throughout the body.



References:

ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Omega3FattyAcids-HealthProfessional

[heart.org](https://www.heart.org)

Does Everyone Need Probiotics?

Probiotics are live microorganisms — most commonly beneficial bacteria — that can help maintain a healthy balance of the gut microbiome when consumed in adequate amounts. It's important to understand that not all probiotics are the same. Different probiotic strains have different functions and potential health benefits.

Natural sources of probiotics include yogurt with live cultures, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, miso, and other fermented foods.

My Advice: For most healthy people, taking probiotics every day isn't necessary. What's far more important than routine supplementation is eating a varied diet rich in fiber, fruits, vegetables, legumes, and other foods that nourish the beneficial bacteria living in your gut. In certain situations — such as during antibiotic treatment or with specific digestive concerns — certain probiotic strains may provide valuable support.



Did You Know?

Probiotics aren't the only factor that supports gut health. Beneficial bacteria also need the right fuel — primarily prebiotics and dietary fiber — to grow, thrive, and perform their important functions.

Want to Learn More?

*If you're a parent and would like to learn more about children's gut health, the gut microbiome, probiotics, and their role in supporting the immune system, I cover these topics in much greater detail in my guide: **Kids Gut Health & Immunity**.*

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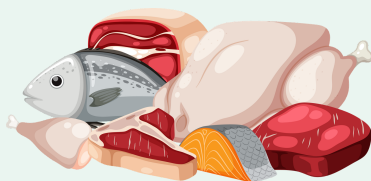
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What Is Creatine?

Creatine is a naturally occurring compound that our bodies produce from amino acids, primarily in the liver and kidneys. About 95% of the body's creatine is stored in skeletal muscle, where it helps produce ATP — the body's primary source of energy for short, high-intensity activities such as strength training, sprinting, and other explosive movements.

Natural sources of creatine include red meat, fish, pork, and poultry. Plant foods contain little to no creatine, which is one reason vegetarians and vegans often have lower creatine stores.

My Advice: If you're a healthy adult looking to improve strength, maintain or increase muscle mass, or support your training performance, creatine can be a valuable addition to a balanced diet, regular exercise, and adequate protein intake. Creatine is not a steroid, and it is one of the most extensively studied dietary supplements in the world. However, people with kidney disease or other chronic medical conditions, as well as women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, should consult their healthcare provider before use.



Did You Know?

One of the most common myths about creatine is that it "causes water retention." Creatine does increase water content — but inside muscle cells, not under the skin. Some people may notice a small increase in body weight during the first few weeks of supplementation — this is a normal and expected effect.

The most extensively studied and widely recommended form is creatine monohydrate. For most people, 3–5 grams per day is considered an effective daily dose.

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Protein or Collagen — Do You Need Both?

What Is Collagen?

Collagen is the most abundant protein in the human body. It serves as the primary structural component of the skin, bones, cartilage, tendons, ligaments, and other connective tissues. Our bodies naturally produce collagen, but collagen production gradually declines with age.

It's important to understand that although collagen is a protein, it is not a complete protein because it doesn't contain all nine essential amino acids. For that reason, collagen shouldn't be your only source of protein. To produce collagen naturally, the body also needs sufficient vitamin C, which plays a crucial role in collagen synthesis.

What Is Protein?

Protein is one of the most important macronutrients in our diet. It's essential for building and repairing muscles, but its role extends far beyond that — protein is needed to produce enzymes, hormones, antibodies, skin, hair, and virtually every tissue throughout the body. High-quality protein sources provide all nine essential amino acids, making them complete proteins.

My Advice: Collagen and protein serve different purposes, so it usually comes down to your goals. If you're focused on muscle building, strength, or overall protein intake, a complete protein source should be your priority. If you're interested in skin, joint, or connective tissue support, collagen can be a nice addition — but it works best alongside, not instead of, a complete protein source.

Did You Know?

Scientists have identified at least 28 different types of collagen in the human body. Three types make up the vast majority: Type I (about 90% of the body's collagen — found in skin, bones, tendons, and ligaments), Type II (the main type in cartilage, important for joint health), and Type III (found in skin, muscles, blood vessels, and certain internal organs).

My Advice — Protein vs. Collagen

They are not interchangeable. If your goal is to increase your daily protein intake, maintain or build muscle, or support recovery after exercise, a protein supplement is the better choice. If your goal is to support the health of your skin, joints, bones, tendons, and connective tissues, collagen may be a beneficial addition. For many people, both can have a place in a healthy lifestyle because they serve different purposes.

Collagen is a protein — but it is not a substitute for adequate protein intake.

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Food Comes First!

If there's one message I'd like you to remember after reading all of these pages about supplements, it's this: food always comes first.

Supplements can be incredibly helpful when there's a genuine need, a confirmed nutrient deficiency, or when they're recommended by a qualified healthcare professional. However, no capsule can replace a balanced diet, quality sleep, regular physical activity, proper hydration, and healthy daily habits.

I work with dietary supplements every day, and I truly believe they can be valuable tools. But I also believe that the biggest difference still comes from the choices we make every single day — the meals we prepare, the habits we build, and the way we care for ourselves.

Let supplements be exactly what their name suggests — a supplement to a healthy lifestyle, never a replacement for one.

When we build a strong foundation, supplements can provide valuable support. Without that foundation, no supplement can do what healthy daily habits can do for our health.



Before You Go

If you've made it to the end of this guide, I'd like to leave you with one final thought.

As a mom of two girls, a wife, and a woman who works, is building her own business, and tries every day to balance many different roles, I've learned one very important lesson: we don't have to be perfect to take good care of our health.

Some days we'll have time to prepare every meal exactly as we planned. Some days we'll exercise, sleep well, and drink enough water. And on other days, we'll simply do the best we can with the circumstances we're given. Both are perfectly okay.

I believe it's completely natural to have goals, to want more for ourselves and our families, and to keep learning and growing throughout life. But I also believe that while we're striving for something better, we shouldn't forget to appreciate everything we already have — and the person we've already become.

Don't let one meal, one day, or even one week pull you away from your goals. Health isn't built in a single perfect day — it's built through hundreds of small decisions we make every single day.

Don't compare your journey to anyone else's. Each of us has a different pace, different challenges, and different life circumstances. The only thing that truly matters is that you keep moving forward — even when your steps feel very small.

Don't strive for perfection. Strive for balance.

Because it's in that balance that we find room for healthy habits, while still making space for family, friends, travel, celebrations, and all the little moments that make life beautiful.

I hope this guide has given you knowledge, confidence, and encouragement, while reminding you that healthy eating doesn't have to be complicated, restrictive, or overwhelming.

I wish you good health, lasting energy, and happiness on your journey. Thank you for placing your trust in me.

Warm regards,

Dragana Valuh



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