

Timing Supplements for Optimal Absorption

How and when you take supplements is just as important as which supplements you take. The timing and quality of supplements determine how many nutrients your body is actually able to absorb and use.

Supplements should be considered (as the name suggests) an adjunct to wholesome, nutritious foods taken to boost nutrients that are deficient or that your body needs a higher amount of. Always think food first! But consider adding a high-quality supplement when needed.

When to Take Supplements

Most supplements should be taken with food to reduce GI upset and improve absorption by slowing down the transit time through the GI tract. However, there are a few that can be taken any time of day irrespective of food.

Here are some strategies for key vitamins and minerals that often need supplementation in the general population. The list below is not exhaustive, and you may need some, all or none of the supplements.

If you have more complex health needs or supplement questions, please contact your healthcare provider or a registered dietitian/nutritionist.

Best with Food

Multivitamin	Prenatal Multivitamin	Iron	Magnesium
Vitamin C	Fish Oil/Omega-3*	Vitamins A, D, E, K*	CoQ10*
* Consume with a meal that contains at least 1 teaspoon, or about 5 grams, of fat to maximize absorption.			

Okay without Food

Chelated Mineral Supplements like Calcium Citrate and Magnesium Glycinate Chelated minerals do not need stomach acid to break them down and can be taken on an empty stomach.
Iron Iron is best absorbed on an empty stomach. However, for many people, taking iron without food causes GI upset. <i>If you do not tolerate iron well, take it with a meal to reduce GI upset.</i>

Better Together

Some nutrients enhance the absorption of other nutrients. Take these supplements at the same time or pair them with food sources of the other nutrient to boost absorption. For example, take iron supplements with an orange or Vitamin D with a bowl of plain, grass-fed Greek yogurt.

Vitamin D, Calcium, Vitamin K2 and Magnesium	Vitamin C and Iron
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Better Apart

Certain nutrients interfere and compete with one another, so it's best to take them at different times to ensure optimal absorption.

- Calcium
 - Do not take with iron supplements or multivitamins containing iron, zinc and magnesium.
 - When taking a separate calcium supplement >200mg per dose, take it 1-2 hours apart from multivitamins or supplements containing iron, zinc, folate or fiber.
 - Most multivitamins contain little to no calcium. However, if your multivitamin contains calcium, as long as it is <200mg per dose, it should not interfere with the absorption of other nutrients.
- Magnesium
 - When taking a separate magnesium supplement >250mg per dose, take it 1-2 hours apart from multivitamins or supplements containing iron, zinc, folate or fiber.
- Zinc
 - It is not advised to take high doses of zinc long-term (50mg or more daily for 10 weeks or longer), because this can cause a copper deficiency. If you are advised to take zinc long-term, consider supplementing with a high dose of copper as well.

Medication/Supplement Interactions

Always consult your healthcare provider, pharmacist and/or registered dietitian/nutritionist before starting a new supplement to ensure it won't interact with any medications you are taking. Here are just a few examples of potential medication/supplement interactions.

Thyroid Medications (Synthroid, Cytomel, Armour Thyroid, Nature-Throid, etc.)	AVOID supplements containing calcium, magnesium, iron and soy and antacids containing aluminum hydroxide or magnesium hydroxide within 4 hours of taking medication. AVOID biotin within 1 hour of taking medication.
Blood-Thinning Medications (Coumadin, Warfarin, etc.)	AVOID taking Vitamin E and K without consulting your healthcare provider. Consume consistent amount of Vitamin K-rich foods (green, leafy veggies).
Bisphosphonates	AVOID calcium supplements within 2 hours of taking medication.
Anti-Seizure Medications	AVOID calcium supplements within 2 hours of taking medication.
PPIs and H2 Blockers (Prilosec, Nexium, Prevacid; Pepcid, Zantac, etc.)	AVOID iron and magnesium supplements within 2 hours of taking medication.

Bottom Line

- When in doubt, take vitamins and minerals with food.
- Remember to take your supplements regularly! Place them in easily visible places you won't overlook.
- Always check with your healthcare provider, pharmacist and/or registered dietitian/nutritionist before starting a new supplement.

Sources: Consumer Lab & [The Washington Post](#)

Revised February 2019

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