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Recommended dietary allowances (RDAs) of nutrients? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I've searched your site (and others as well) — I am looking for a listing of the US RDA for all vitamins and minerals in one place all together. I am looking for a vitamin supplement and want to get one that is as complete as possible and want to be able to make comparisons of products available. Thank you so much for your help.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) refer to the average dietary intake level that adequately meets the nutritional needs of most people. Prepared by the Food and Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences, RDAs are periodically updated to establish “standards to serve as a goal for good nutrition” for populations, not individuals. They include nutrients which have been scientifically found to be required for optimal health, and thus, provide the basis for evaluating population-wide diets. Many mistake these guidelines for daily allowances (how much of a given nutrient is recommended daily), but obtaining all of these nutrients isn't dependent on a person consuming them every single day in those specific amounts. In order to ensure that the majority of people eat the necessary amount of nutrients, RDAs are set at “safe level” which exceed the actual health requirements for most people. Given that you expressed interest in gaining some of these nutrients through a vitamin, it's imperative to note that dietary supplements aren't suitable for everyone depending on their health status, health history, and current dietary patterns. Furthermore, supplements aren't always regulated on the market, so they may pose potential health risks to unsuspecting buyers. As such, it's strongly recommended that you meet with your health care provider *before* introducing new supplements into your diet. The good news is you may not need supplements to get the nutritional benefits; rather, a balanced diet can typically provide the same nutrients you'd receive from a supplement (more on that in a bit)!

Given the ease and convenience of supplements, some people may turn to them as their primary form of nourishing their bodies and neglect eating a wholesome diet. This isn't recommended as it may result in nutrient deficiencies. While some supplements may contain nutrient amounts equivalent to the RDA, you won't find a supplement with every imaginable nutrient, vitamin, and

mineral, as there are countless substances that keep people healthy, many of which cannot be packaged into a pill form. Even if there was a neat pill which had all the nutrients you needed, supplements may still not be right for you. Beyond their potential health benefits (or lack thereof), there are *still* other factors to consider when deciding whether or not to take supplements, including your age, allergies, health conditions, and diet. These factors may alter how effective these pills are in your body. Thus, if you choose to take supplements, it's highly recommended that you do so *only after* speaking with a medical provider.

Many health professionals advocate that people get the nutrients they need without the use of supplements, if possible. Luckily, many nutrients can usually be obtained through a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein! Incorporating these foods into your diet can be made simpler with the [Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) [2]. These guidelines provide helpful ways that you can gradually alter your diet to best suit your needs, emphasizing that you don't need to drastically change your diet overnight. In fact, it directly advocates that people make smaller and easier-to-follow dietary changes over a period of time. Additionally, they comprehensively breakdown where you can find key nutrients, including the vitamins and minerals you're looking for and how you can incorporate these foods into your diet. Ultimately, the emphasis here is on consuming a balanced diet over time and keeping a consistent dietary pattern, which is what sets these recommendations apart from many others.

When all's said and done, if you still want to introduce dietary supplements into your diet, there are some considerations to keep in mind before selecting one. Many manufacturers may put forward false claims, just to reap the profits. Additionally, dietary supplement manufacturers aren't permitted to use language that makes health claims such as "curing" or "treating" any diseases. Hence, it's highly recommended to do your own research into suppliers and their claims about their supplements. If you choose to shop for supplements, here are some tips to ensure your safety and well-being:

- Look beyond the manufacturer's website and consider non-commercial websites such as the [Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#) [3], [National Institute of Health \(NIH\)](#) [4], and [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#) [5].
- Exercise caution against extreme language, including promises of no side effects or absolute safety.
- Remember that "natural" does not necessarily mean "safe."
- Speak with your health care provider before taking any supplements.

It's clear that you care about your health, and asking these types of questions helps you make the more informed decisions. In most cases, dietary supplements aren't necessary for people to get all the nutrients and health benefits that they're looking for. It may be the case that a balanced diet *can* provide you with what you need and can be tailored to meet any changes in your health or lifestyle. That said, if you decide to take a dietary supplement, working with a health care provider can ensure that you are taking the appropriate dosage and type for you, as well as provide recommendations to make sure that the supplement you're taking is safe.

Take care,

Alice!

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