

Supplements

Many people take one or more dietary supplements daily with the goal of improving their overall health. Popular dietary supplements include vitamins, minerals, herbs and botanicals, amino acids, and enzymes. Read on to learn more about these supplements and why it's important to speak with your dentist and physician about any that you may be taking.

What are dietary supplements?

Dietary supplements are intended to provide nutrients in addition to those you consume through your daily diet. These products may include vitamins and minerals, as well as herbs and botanicals. Supplements come in many forms: tablets, capsules, and powders, as well as drinks and energy bars. Most of these supplements can be bought at grocery or drug stores without a prescription.

Why would I take a dietary supplement?

If you don't have a well-balanced diet—which includes a variety of fruits, vegetables, and protein—you may decide to take a multivitamin as a way to fill the nutritional gap. Popular dietary supplements include vitamins B, C, and D, as well as calcium, which may help in strengthening your bones and teeth.

Remember: Dietary supplements are not intended to treat, prevent, or cure diseases. Also, though supplements may claim to help the immune system, boost energy, relieve anxiety, improve mental clarity, enhance sleep quality and quantity, or promote an overall sense of well-being, it's important to be wary of such claims, as many lack the scientific data to support them.

Which supplements may offer oral health benefits?

Calcium and xylitol are among the popular supplements that may offer oral health benefits.

- **Calcium**—which is a mineral—helps you maintain strong bones and teeth. Calcium deficiencies have been linked to gum disease, which can lead to tooth loss.
- **Xylitol** is used as a sweetener in many sugar-free products like gum and candy, and it may help minimize plaque and salivary levels, as well as decrease caries. (However, xylitol is considered toxic for some animals, so keep xylitol-sweetened products away from your household pets.)

In addition, vitamins A, C, and E may offer benefits for gum healing.



Are there risks to taking dietary supplements?

Some dietary supplements can increase the risk of bleeding or, if you take them before or after surgery, can affect your response to anesthesia. Dietary supplements also can interact with certain prescription drugs. For example, vitamin K can reduce the ability of blood thinners to prevent your blood from clotting, and St. John's wort can speed the breakdown of many drugs (including antidepressants and birth control pills), reducing their effectiveness. Plus, if you take too many vitamins and minerals, you could experience side effects (depending on the supplement), including headaches, organ damage, loss of bone strength, and even birth defects.

Talking to your dentist about supplements

Nearly 70 percent of patients do not discuss their dietary supplement use with their health care providers—which puts them at risk for adverse side effects. Since some dietary supplements may interfere with the treatment or medications prescribed by your dentist, you should tell your dentist if you are taking dietary supplements to avoid unwanted interactions.

For more information about dietary supplements, talk with your dentist and physician.