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SUPPLEMENT GUIDE

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Supplement Guide

Once upon a time, there was this thing called food. People would eat it regularly and rely on it for survival. But then... something happened. Not necessarily a bad thing, but something. Lives became busy. Technology became more advanced. People didn't have the same time they once did to get the proper nutrients in their diets that they wanted. That's when another "thing" called supplements stormed onto the scene.

Just think of the word "supplement" for a second. It can be used as a verb or noun. You can "supplement" your diet with this or you can use that to "supplement" your diet. You can also take a "supplement" to improve your health, speed your recoveries or do a thousand other things that make you virtually indestructible.

However you slice it, the supplement industry is booming and here to stay. It is in your best interest to collect as much data as you can so you know what to use, when to use it and how to use it. As long as you don't go overboard, you can feel the benefits that supplements have to offer. Here is a collection of popular options and what they are designed for.





Multivitamins

Fast-paced lifestyles seem to have become all the rage these days. People hustle to get ahead and make the big bucks and live the lavish lifestyle. There's nothing wrong with that, but there is something wrong with neglecting your diet.

Often times this type of living comes with a price. You are so busy that you often reach for unhealthy fare or eat healthy fare, but just not enough of it. That's where multi-vitamins come into play.

Just think of these as a big bowl of fruits and vegetables packed into a small serving size in the form of a pill, capsule, powder or liquid. It's a lot faster and easier to swallow a couple pills than it is to eat 1 ½ servings of produce. And a lot of multivitamins often have that many servings!

You are best going with a whole food vitamin, which means it is made completely of "whole" foods. These can usually be taken without food as well.

Just be careful when buying your multis because they often contain fillers and artificial colors and flavors. You want your vitamins to be as pure as possible. If you see anything in the ingredient label that you cannot pronounce or that can't be extracted and taken alone, then leave it on the shelf.

One more note about vitamins before you move ahead. Specific varieties also contain greens and fruits that are really high in antioxidants. These are usually in powder form and mix easily in water. Because they have fruit extracts, they also taste good.

This type of supplement is a great one-stop-shop where you get an abundance of vitamins and minerals, plus an immunity boost.



Amino Acids

You saw the words “amino acids” pop up above a few times. If you remember from earlier, these are the building blocks of protein and they are either essential or nonessential.

Often times they are referred to as branch chain amino acids, or BCAAs. Aside from their role in cell repair, they also boost immunity, help with hormone production, transport oxygen in the body and help you recover faster from tough workouts.

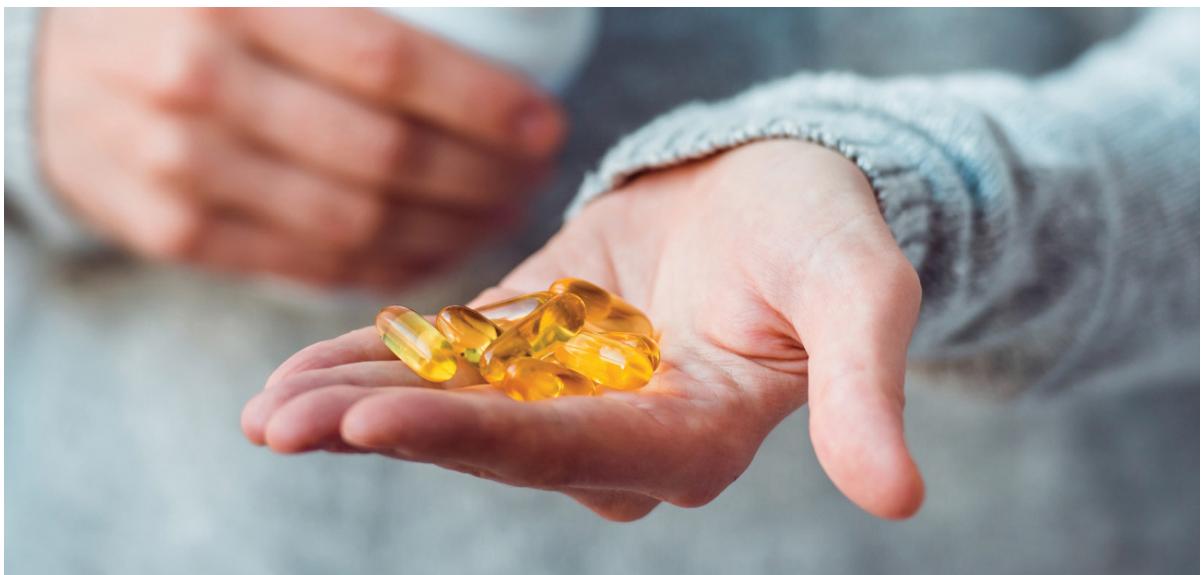
In the marketplace, you can easily find BCAAs in powder and pill form. They are best taken right before and/or after exercise.

Just so you are aware of the different amino acids, the essential aminos consist of valine, histidine, leucine, methionine, tryptophan, isoleucine, threonine, phenylalanine and lysine. Unless you are studying for a chemistry exam, that's probably more information than you need to know. But it's always good to broaden your horizons and impress friends with your new-found knowledge.

Glutamine

Glutamine, also referred to as L-glutamine, is an amino acid that carries on important roles in your attempt to build a jaw-dropping body. First and foremost, it helps prevent your muscles from breaking down (catabolizing) from hard workouts. Secondly, it improves your strength by speeding up your recovery times. Lastly, it contributes to a higher metabolism by boosting your body's ability to release human growth hormone.

If that's not good enough, it also helps with gut health and immunity boosting. This stack of benefits should give you all the motivation you need to add it to your supplementation regimen. You can find it in powder and capsule form.



Fish Oil

If your diet is low in fat, then you will suffer the consequences both physically and mentally. Your brain requires adequate amounts of fat to concentrate and perform general cognitive functions. Your joints need fat for lubrication and to allow you to move with grace and ease. You need fat for proper hormone function, which includes human growth hormone and testosterone. Lastly, fat acts as an insulator and cushion to your organs.

As you can see, the low-fat, no-fat hype is outdated and you should never deprive your body of this vital substance. Fish oil is a good option to incorporate because it is high in Omega-3s, which are the healthy types of fat that give you all the benefits listed above.

You can find this in either capsule or liquid form. There is no right or wrong version. Just opt for the one that sits best in your stomach and is easiest to include in your diet.

Electrolytes

Water does the trick when you do regular workouts. But, once you cross the line of about 90-plus minutes of intense exercise with profuse sweating, your electrolytes can start getting depleted. That's when you "bonk" and can suffer side effects like dizziness, extreme lethargy, racing heart rate and tingling sensations through your limbs.

The market is flooded with scientifically engineered "sport" drinks that can combat dehydration or prevent it in the first place, but you can also find tablets and powders that dissolve in water for your electrolyte fix.

Try a few different things out and use whatever agrees best with your system. And don't make the mistake of trying something new during a race. If you happen to have a bad reaction and develop some kind of stomach discomfort, you will pay the price.

Experiment weeks ahead of time to see if you can tolerate the products and to adapt to them.



Pre-workout Formulas

You would be hard pressed to find someone in the gym, cranking out reps or sprinting on a treadmill who does not use a pre-workout formula. These are by far one of the most popular supplements in the marketplace.

Everyone from stay-at-home moms to beefcake bodybuilders to high school kids rely on these to get through their workouts or they'd be flatter than a nori sheet. That begs the question, just what is all the hype with pre-workout formulas?

Well, the short answer is, they give you a boost of energy. And this can range from mild to extreme. To some, the feeling you get is euphoric, and that's what keeps them coming back for more.

Pre-workout formulas come in powders and ready-to-drink containers. If you scanned the labels, you would find a host of ingredients, such as caffeine and caffeine derivatives, B-vitamins, creatine, arginine, beta alanine and L-citrulline. Here's a little description of each so you're not on neural overload.

Caffeine is pretty obvious; it gives you energy. It also boosts your brain function, allowing you to concentrate on pushing harder. Lastly, it has mood-boosting potential. Just be aware that caffeine is a stimulant. And some of the pre-workout formulas have really high doses.

Every container will have a warning label, listing the possible side effects. Read carefully and heed the warning if it pertains to you! Dropping flat on your face from a bad reaction to caffeine while running on a treadmill will not get you too many dates!



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Your B-vitamins help with energy release as well, but they do not have a stimulant effect like caffeine. They are more beneficial for breaking down protein, carbs and fats in the body when you eat them in solid form. Plus they help with cardiovascular function, nervous system function and red blood cell formation.

Creatine is often used as a standalone supplement, but sometimes thrown into a pre-workout formula. Simply put, it gives your muscles the ability to lift heavier weights and do more reps. If you want to get technical, it fires up your ATP(adenosine triphosphate) stores, which is the energy needed by muscles to contract. It also helps speed the recovery process.

Arginine is often referred to as L-arginine and it is a non-essential amino acid. It works to aid the production of nitric oxide (NO₂), another popular supplement. Whatever you call it, the function is still the same. It boosts oxygen and blood flow to your muscles while working out, which increases your strength levels and gives you that veiny, vasodilated look.

Beta alanine is part of the composition of L-carnosine. This amino acid helps boost immunity and also gives you extra umph when you take your intensity to the next level during training. Boosting immunity is important because you build up free radicals when you train, especially at higher intensities. You don't want free radicals to get out of control because that's when disease and sickness rolls in.

L-citrulline is another energy booster that delays the onset of fatigue when you're grinding away in the gym. And just for the record, it is also known as citrulline malate. Another perk of L-citrulline is its ability to boost NO₂ levels. Remember, this gives you more of a pump and affords you the ability to lift heavier and go harder.

With the exception of citrulline, you can get any one of these supplements in a form by themselves. Caffeine is probably the most easily attainable. Coffee, for example, is nothing more than a cup of liquid caffeine at your fingertips. If you can tolerate its heat and need a pick-me-up before your workout, sip on a cup of Joe.

When using a pre-workout formula, always be careful of how your body reacts. You will know pretty shortly after taking one if it resonates with you or not. If you feel really jittery, anxious and your heart starts racing, you best not use it.

Also be aware of the additional ingredients that you see in the fine print. These formulas often contain artificial flavors, colors and sweeteners. You might be fine with caffeine and creatine, but could have a reaction to the other stuff. If so, stop using it immediately. That should come as no surprise.

The bottom line is, always follow the directions, start off with a lower dose and let your body acclimate. Certain pre-workout formulas have the equivalent of 4 cups of coffee per serving! If you never drink coffee, it's not a good idea to start there. Find one with a smaller dose or just simply take less.



Proteins

Good old protein powder ranks high on the list of popular supplements. It also comes in the form of ready-to-drink liquid that's stowed away in convenient cans, plastic bottles or these fancy cardboard-like boxes called tetra paks.

In the world of bodybuilding and fitness, protein is needed to repair broken down muscle fiber. The purpose of protein supplements is for those who go really hard and need extra protein they do not get in their diet. Plus it works well for people who just don't eat much protein to start with.

Another purpose to supplement with protein is for weight loss. People often resort to it because it fills you up and keeps your hunger under control for an extended period of time. Couple that with the fact that it has zero effect on your blood sugar levels, and you have a winning combination in the fight against fat.

The best time to take protein supplements is a bit debatable. There are some who drink them right before or during exercise and there are others who have them right after exercise. The key is to just make sure you feed yourself a regular dose of protein every few hours through the course of the day. But if you are going to use it in close proximity to your workout, go with a whey protein.

This has a high biological value, which means it digests quickly and easily in your system. In the case of workouts, you want protein to get to your muscles as fast as possible.

In addition, you will find a whole slew of protein powders on the shelves, such as soy, hemp, pea, egg white, bone broth and rice. All of the non-animal derived versions are good for people with allergies or who are vegan.

If you go back to the people looking to lose weight, they often have a protein shake for breakfast and maybe one or two more during the day as part of their multiple-meal plan. Just remember that what works best for you does not work best for everyone.

And don't get protein powders and shakes confused with meal replacements. They are not one in the same. A meal replacement powder or MRP as they're sometimes called, is more like a balanced meal in one shot.

You get a balance of protein, carbs and fat, and often times a blend of vitamins and minerals. Unlike protein formulas, these often have fiber too, which also helps fill you up. You can also find these in liquid form and they are best used in a multiple meal a day plan.

Lastly, you need to know about bars. Although they are almost always referred to as "protein bars," that's not entirely the case. Yes there are protein bars that are high in protein, low in carbs and low in fat, but there are also nutrition bars that are not.

Much like MRPs, nutrition bars often have a balance of protein, carbs and fat, plus a handful of vitamins and minerals. They are made with some form of protein and can be slipped right into your meal plan like a drinkable meal replacement.

Summarization

As you are probably well aware by now, food is good, but it can't always get you where you want to go. This is especially the case when you are pressed for time or out in the field and don't have access to adequate provisions. But as beneficial as supplements are, just be aware that they should not be a complete replacement for good quality food. You are best advised to create a balance and use them as needed for specific goals.

With all the above being said, you are left with only one chore - to maintain what you've gained. Often times this is the hardest part of the puzzle. Read through the Maintenance Guide to find ways to stay on track once you have gotten to your desired place of satisfaction.



TRAIN HARD. WORK HARD. STAY FOCUSED.

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