

## Should You Take a Dietary Supplement?

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### Dietary Supplements: Facts vs. Myths

Perceptions about dietary supplements are widespread. Can you decipher facts from myths when it comes to dietary supplements?

Fact	Myth
	1. Dietary supplements can make up for poor food choices.
	2. Taking supplements can prevent, treat or cure most diseases.
	3. If it's herbal, it's not harmful.
	4. "Stress" vitamins can help when I'm under a lot of "emotional stress."
	5. Dietary supplements can protect me from the harmful effects of smoking or alcohol.
	6. If I can buy it, it's safe.
	7. Taking the right supplement can help with weight loss.

**1. Myth.** No dietary supplement can make up for a poor lifestyle or food choices. Supplements provide vitamins and minerals, but they do not offer either the synergistic benefit of the diet or all the active compounds offered in food required for optimal health. Eating a variety of healthy foods will provide the nutrients our bodies need to function at their best in most cases.

**2. Myth.** There is no scientific evidence in humans that dietary supplements can prevent, treat or cure cancer, heart disease, diabetes and other chronic illnesses. Vitamin C is often touted as a natural remedy for the common cold. However, evidence suggests it may only have a minor role in reducing the duration of cold symptoms in adults, and there is no evidence that regular vitamin C supplementation reduces the incidence of the common cold.

**3. Myth.** Many drugs and toxic chemicals, as well as herbal supplements, are plant-based. Just like prescription medications, supplements have side effects. Some side effects may be harmful, depending on the herbal supplement, dosage and interactions it will have with other medications or supplements. Always check with your doctor before beginning a dietary supplement.

**4. Myth.** Claims advertising dietary supplements to "de-stress" life are misleading. The best dietary advice for the demands of stress is to follow a healthy eating pattern, engage in consistent physical activity, get adequate sleep, take time to relax and do activities you enjoy.

**5. Myth.** Dietary supplements cannot prevent the harmful effects of smoking or alcohol use. Actually, smoking increases the need for vitamin C, and keep in mind that beta-carotene supplements can actually increase lung cancer risk.



among smokers. Lastly, excessive alcohol consumption can interfere with the body's use of several nutrients.

**6. Myth.** Dietary supplements are not regulated like drugs in the United States, so they may not be as safe as you assume. Clinical trials are not required for them, and testing is expensive and not universal. This means the producers of supplements do not need to prove their claims to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) or any authoritative body. Additionally, dangerous substances have been found in supplements. Two examples of dangerous substances include Chaparral and Kava, and both are herbs that can cause liver damage. Lastly, several supplements have been found to contain substances not on the label. Another point to be aware of with herbal supplements is the strengths may vary depending on how, when and where they are grown.

**7. Myth.** Weight loss supplements that claim to trap fat, block carbs or boost metabolism typically have similar results to placebos when studied. No over-the-counter supplements have proven to effectively help people lose weight. Some have only shown a temporary decrease in appetite. Overall, the evidence supporting the use of dietary supplements to reduce body weight and stimulate weight loss is inconclusive and unconvincing, and the cost of these products can be considerable. The best way to lose weight and keep it off is to follow a sensible approach that incorporates a healthy eating plan, reduced caloric intake and moderate physical activity under the guidance of a healthcare provider.

### Who May Benefit from a Dietary Supplement

- Pregnant women have an increased need for folic acid, so they may need a vitamin B supplement.
- Many people over 50 years old may have difficulty absorbing vitamin B12 from food, so they may need a vitamin B12 supplement.
- Vegans are strict vegetarians who avoid all animal foods and may also need a vitamin B12 supplement.

- Elderly people at risk for osteoporosis may need calcium supplements.
- People who rarely are exposed to sunlight may need vitamin D supplements.
- Dark-skinned, obese and elderly people may also require a vitamin D supplement.
- People with medical conditions or who are unable to absorb enough nutrients, such as individuals who have anemia, bariatric surgery, bowel resections and other malabsorptive conditions, may need certain supplements.

### What About Taking a Daily Multivitamin

Taking a daily multivitamin supplement that provides no more than 100% of the daily value (DV) is usually considered safe. The FDA advises talking to your medical professional before deciding to purchase or use a daily multivitamin since some vitamins or minerals can interact with medications. It is also suggested to look for third-party certifications. Several third-party companies offer quality control tests to ensure that products contain what their labels say they do. Supplement companies pay for these tests and receive certifications that will be printed on the labels or their websites. Reputable third-party testing companies are **ConsumerLab.com**, **NSF International**, and the **U.S. Pharmacopeial Convention**.

### Food is Best

A balanced diet of whole foods provides more than vitamins and minerals. Whole foods provide macronutrients, fiber and phytonutrients that cannot be replaced in supplement form. Best of all, a balanced whole-food meal pattern is an evidence-based strategy for protecting your health. For more information on how to choose foods that provide the daily requirements for nutrients, see the following USDA websites: **Choose MyPlate** and **The Dietary Guidelines for Americans**.

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#### References:

[National Institutes of Health Office of Dietary Supplements](#)

[National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health \(NCCIH\) and the National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#)

[U.S. Food and Drug Association](#)

[Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#)

[USDA MyPlate U.S. Department of Agriculture](#)

[DGA Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#)



## Featured Recipe

# Spinach Salad with Quinoa, Chicken & Fresh Berries

For complete recipe and nutrition facts: [Eating Well](#)

Active Time: **10 minutes**

Total Time: **10 minutes**

Servings: **2**



### INGREDIENTS

**3 cups** fresh baby spinach or mixed greens

**1 cup** cooked quinoa

**¾ cup** chopped cooked chicken breast

**½ cup** fresh blueberries or sliced fresh strawberries

**½ ounce** crumbled feta cheese (2 tablespoons)

**2 tablespoons** sliced almonds, toasted

**2 tablespoons** extra-virgin olive oil

**1 tablespoon** white wine vinegar

**¼ teaspoon** Dijon mustard

**½ teaspoon** honey

**½ teaspoon** kosher salt

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Place** spinach, quinoa, and chicken in two (one quart) airtight containers. **Top** each salad with berries, cheese and almonds. **Cover and chill** until ready to serve.
- 2.** Just before serving, **whisk** together oil, vinegar, mustard, honey and salt in a small bowl. **Divide** dressing evenly between the salads and **toss** to coat; **serve** immediately.

### Nutritional Information:

Serving Size: 1 1/2 cups spinach, 1/2 cup quinoa, 1/3 cup chicken, 1/4 cup berries, 1 tbsp. cheese, and 1 tbsp. almonds

Calories: 410; Total Carbohydrates: 31g; Dietary Fiber: 6g; Total Sugars: 6g; Added Sugars: 1g; Protein: 23g; Total Fat: 22g; Saturated Fat: 4g; Sodium: 860mg.

