

Supplement Guide

Common uses. Research. Safety. Better questions.

8 supplement information sheets, arranged alphabetically.

Compiled October 19, 2026

Use this guide to prepare conversations with your doctor or pharmacist. Evidence labels describe research, not a promise that a supplement will help or be safe for you.

This guide does not diagnose illness or replace medical care. Do not change prescribed treatment based on it. Check each sheet for its own source-review date; the compilation date does not mean every entry has been newly reviewed.

Source links in the individual sheets are clickable. Use the contents or PDF bookmarks to jump to an entry.

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Understanding Supplement Types

A dietary supplement is a product taken by mouth to add to the diet. Vitamins are one type of supplement, alongside minerals, herbs and other ingredients.

These seven groups organize this guide; they are not an official FDA classification. Groups can overlap, and more may be added. The category does not tell you whether a product works or is safe.

Vitamins And Multivitamins

Nutrients needed in small amounts for normal body functions.

Examples: Vitamin B12, vitamin D, multivitamins

Minerals

Elements used for functions such as bone health, muscles and nerves.

Examples: Calcium, magnesium, iron, zinc

Herbs And Plant Extracts

Plants or concentrated ingredients taken from plants.

Examples: Turmeric, ginger, echinacea

Amino Acids And Related Compounds

Protein building blocks and substances related to them.

Examples: L-lysine, acetyl-L-carnitine

Oils And Fatty Acids

Fats and oils sold to add particular fatty acids to the diet.

Examples: Fish oil, EPA and DHA omega-3s

Enzymes

Substances that help chemical reactions happen; digestive enzymes help break down food.

Examples: Lactase, digestive enzyme blends

Other Dietary Supplements

Ingredients that do not fit neatly into the groups above.

Examples: CoQ10, alpha-lipoic acid, probiotics, apple cider vinegar products

Food and supplement forms differ: turmeric in cooking or vinegar in a dressing is food; concentrated supplement products are different. Medicines are a separate category.

Learn more: [FDA - Dietary Supplements](#)

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Acetyl-L-Carnitine

Also called ALC or ALCAR | Amino Acids And Related Compounds

What Is It?

Acetyl-L-carnitine is a substance your body makes naturally. It helps your cells turn fat into energy. It is also sold as a supplement, often promoted for nerve pain, memory and energy. Research does not clearly support all of these advertised benefits. [1,2]

Why People Take It - And How Strong the Research Is

Nerve pain caused by diabetes | BENEFIT UNCERTAIN. Some studies suggest it may help. But a 2019 review by Cochrane, a research organization, found that the studies were not reliable enough to know whether it reduces pain or improves how nerves work. This does not mean it never helps; it means we cannot be sure. [2]

Memory and thinking problems | RESULTS ARE MIXED. Some studies found improvements and others did not. The research summarized by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) does not support routinely using it to treat dementia, an illness that affects memory and thinking. [1]

More energy or better exercise performance | NOT ENOUGH EVIDENCE. Helping cells make energy does not necessarily mean that taking extra will make you feel more energetic. Research on other types of carnitine does not necessarily apply to this type. [1]

What these labels mean: They describe how much we can trust the research for each use. They do not tell you whether it will help you personally or whether it is safe for you.

Side Effects And Important Safety Concerns

Cancer treatment warning: Acetyl-L-carnitine can make nerve damage from chemotherapy worse. Do not take it to prevent this problem. If you are receiving cancer treatment, talk with your cancer care team before using it. [3]

Carnitine supplements can cause an upset stomach, diarrhea, headache or an unusual body odor. Talk with your doctor first if you have seizures or kidney disease. Ask a pharmacist to check whether it could affect any of your medicines, especially blood thinners such as warfarin. Other medicine problems are possible too. [1,3]

Questions To Ask Your Doctor Or Pharmacist

Could this help with my symptoms? Is it safe with my health conditions and medicines? If I try it, how much should I take and for how long? What improvement should I look for? When should I stop?

Where To Find Additional Information

1. [NIH Office of Dietary Supplements - Carnitine](#)
2. [Cochrane - Acetyl-L-carnitine for diabetic neuropathy \(2019\)](#)
3. [Memorial Sloan Kettering - Carnitine: benefits, risks and interactions](#)

Updated October 17, 2026; sources checked October 15, 2026. This guide is for learning, not for diagnosing or treating an illness. Talk with your healthcare provider before changing prescribed treatment.

Alpha-Lipoic Acid

Also called ALA or thioctic acid | Other Dietary Supplements

What Is It?

Alpha-lipoic acid is a substance your body makes to help turn food into energy. It is also sold as a supplement, often promoted for nerve pain and blood sugar control. [1]

Why People Take It - And How Strong the Research Is

Nerve pain caused by diabetes | RESULTS ARE MIXED. Some shorter studies found symptom relief. However, a 2024 Cochrane review found that ALA probably made little or no difference to symptoms after six months. It has not been established as a way to reverse nerve damage. [2,3]

Blood sugar control | NO CLEAR, RELIABLE BENEFIT. Studies have not consistently shown useful improvements. ALA should not replace insulin or other diabetes medicines. [3]

What these labels mean: They summarize the research for each use. They do not predict whether it will help you personally or whether it is safe for you.

Regular ALA Or R-ALA: Is One Better?

What is the difference? Regular ALA usually contains equal amounts of two forms called R and S. R-ALA contains only the R form, which your body naturally makes. [1]

Should I use only R-ALA for diabetic nerve pain? There is not convincing evidence that it relieves nerve pain better than regular ALA. R-ALA may be absorbed differently, but better absorption does not prove better symptom relief. Much of the clinical research used the regular R/S mixture. The evidence does not establish that you need to switch or pay more for R-ALA. [1,2]

Side Effects And Important Safety Concerns

Possible side effects include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea or a skin rash. ALA may lower blood sugar, especially when taken with insulin or other diabetes medicines. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about monitoring when starting it or changing products or doses. Do not adjust prescribed medicines on your own. [1,3]

Review all medicines and supplements with a pharmacist. Talk with your doctor before use during pregnancy or breastfeeding. Keep supplements away from children; large overdoses can be dangerous. [1]

Questions To Ask Your Doctor Or Pharmacist

Is ALA worth trying for my symptoms? Which product and dose should I use? How long should I try it? What improvement should I track? Could it cause low blood sugar with my medicines?

Where To Find Additional Information

1. [Oregon State University, Linus Pauling Institute - Lipoic Acid](#)
2. [Cochrane - Alpha-lipoic acid for diabetic nerve damage \(2024\)](#)
3. [NIH / NCCIH - Diabetes and Dietary Supplements](#)

Sources checked October 17, 2026. This guide is for learning, not for diagnosing or treating an illness. Talk with your healthcare provider before changing prescribed treatment.

Apple Cider Vinegar

Also called ACV | Other Dietary Supplements

What Is It?

Apple cider vinegar is made by fermenting apple juice. Its main acid gives it a sour taste. It is used in cooking and sold as drinks, tablets and gummies, often promoted for blood sugar control, weight loss or digestion. [1,2]

Why People Take It - And How Strong the Research Is

Blood sugar control | LIMITED, INCONSISTENT EVIDENCE. Some small studies suggest lower blood sugar after meals or improvements in fasting readings. Studies differ, and lasting benefit remains uncertain. It should not replace insulin or other diabetes treatment. [1]

Weight loss | NO RELIABLE EVIDENCE OF LASTING BENEFIT. Small, short studies do not establish meaningful long-term weight loss. It is not a proven weight-loss treatment. [1,2]

Heartburn or digestion | NOT ESTABLISHED. There is no good evidence that vinegar treats acid reflux. Its acid can irritate the throat and stomach rather than help. [1]

Does The Product Form Matter?

Food vinegar, capsules and gummies are not interchangeable. Added ingredients and amounts vary. Do not assume that a study of liquid vinegar proves the same benefit for a gummy or tablet. Check the full label with your pharmacist. [1,2]

Side Effects And Important Safety Concerns

Do not drink vinegar straight. Its acid can damage tooth enamel and irritate the throat. If you choose to use food vinegar, mix it into food, such as salad dressing, or dilute it well. Never drink cleaning vinegar. [1,2]

It can interact with insulin and water pills (diuretics) and contribute to low potassium. With insulin, low blood sugar is also a concern. Ask your clinician before regular use if you have diabetes, low potassium or stomach problems. Do not change prescribed medicines on your own. [2,3]

Questions To Ask Your Doctor Or Pharmacist

Is there a useful reason for me to take it? Could it affect my blood sugar or potassium? Is it likely to worsen my stomach symptoms? Would a better-studied approach help more?

Evidence labels describe research, not a guarantee of personal benefit or safety.

Where To Find Additional Information

1. [Harvard Nutrition Source - Vinegar and health claims](#)
2. [Mayo Clinic - Apple cider vinegar for weight loss](#)
3. [Cleveland Clinic - Apple cider vinegar: benefits and risks](#)

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Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10)

Also called CoQ10 | Other Dietary Supplements

What Is It?

CoQ10 is a substance your body makes naturally. Your cells use it to help turn food into energy. It also helps protect cells from certain types of damage. It is sold as a supplement, often promoted for heart health, muscle discomfort and migraine prevention. [1,4]

Why People Take It - And How Strong the Research Is

Muscle pain while taking statins | BENEFIT NOT CLEAR. Statins are medicines that lower cholesterol. Studies have disagreed about whether CoQ10 helps with muscle pain. NIH says the overall evidence does not support this use. Tell your prescriber about muscle symptoms rather than stopping your statin on your own. [1]

Heart failure | POSSIBLE BENEFIT; UNCERTAINTY REMAINS. Heart failure means the heart does not pump as well as it should. A 2021 Cochrane review found that CoQ10 probably reduces deaths from any cause and hospital stays for heart failure, but evidence for several other outcomes was uncertain. Any use should be discussed with your heart specialist and added to, rather than replace, prescribed care. [3]

Migraine prevention | LIMITED, PROMISING EVIDENCE. Small studies suggest it may reduce how often migraines happen and how long they last. It has not clearly reduced pain severity, and more research is needed. It is not a quick treatment for an attack already happening. [2]

What these labels mean: They summarize the research for each use. They do not predict whether it will help you personally or whether it is safe for you.

Side Effects And Important Safety Concerns

CoQ10 may cause stomach upset or trouble sleeping. It can make warfarin, a blood thinner, work less well. Ask your warfarin prescriber before starting or stopping it; blood tests may need closer monitoring. [1,4]

It may also interact with insulin, blood pressure medicines and some cancer treatments. Ask your care team to check your medicines. Safety during pregnancy and breastfeeding is not established. Do not change prescribed medicines on your own. [1,4]

Questions To Ask Your Doctor Or Pharmacist

What benefit should I expect? Which form and dose should I use? How long should I try it? What should I track? Will I need extra blood sugar, blood pressure or warfarin monitoring?

Where To Find Additional Information

1. [NIH / NCCIH - Coenzyme Q10](#)
2. [NIH / NCCIH - Headaches: What You Need To Know](#)
3. [Cochrane - Coenzyme Q10 for heart failure \(2021 review\)](#)
4. [Mayo Clinic - Coenzyme Q10](#)

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Fish Oil (Omega-3)

Common ingredients: EPA and DHA | Oils And Fatty Acids

What Is It?

Fish oil contains omega-3 fats called EPA and DHA. These fats help cells function. Supplements are sold as capsules or liquids. Algae oil can provide DHA and sometimes EPA without fish. [1]

Why People Take It - And How Strong the Research Is

High triglycerides | STRONG EVIDENCE FOR PRESCRIPTION PRODUCTS. Triglycerides are fats in the blood. Prescription omega-3 medicines can lower high levels. Store-bought fish oil is not a substitute for the prescribed product or dose. [1,2]

Preventing heart attacks | DEPENDS ON THE PRODUCT AND PERSON. Ordinary fish oil is not a proven heart-attack prevention treatment for everyone. Certain prescription products help selected patients. Benefits from eating fish should not be assumed to apply to capsules. [1,2]

Rheumatoid arthritis | POSSIBLE ADD-ON BENEFIT. Some studies suggest reduced need for pain medicines when omega-3s are added to usual treatment. They do not replace arthritis care. [1]

What Should I Look For On The Label?

Check the amounts of EPA and DHA per serving, not just the total fish oil. A capsule labeled 1,000 mg fish oil does not necessarily contain 1,000 mg EPA plus DHA. Cod liver oil also contains vitamins A and D, which can add to other supplements. [1]

Side Effects And Important Safety Concerns

Possible effects include a fishy taste, burping, heartburn, nausea or diarrhea. High doses can increase the risk of atrial fibrillation, an irregular heartbeat, and may increase bleeding risk. Tell your clinician about blood thinners, planned surgery, fish allergies or a history of heart rhythm problems. [1,2]

Do not start high-dose treatment on your own. Ask your pharmacist to check the product and dose against your medicines and other supplements. [1,2]

Questions To Ask Your Doctor Or Pharmacist

Do I need fish oil for a specific reason? Should I use a prescription product? How much EPA and DHA does this serving contain? Do my heart rhythm history or medicines change the risks?

Evidence labels describe research, not a guarantee of personal benefit or safety.

Where To Find Additional Information

1. NIH ODS - Omega-3 Fatty Acids: [consumer guide](#)

2. NIH NHLBI - Omega-3s: [heart benefits and risks](#)

Sources checked October 17, 2026. This guide is for learning, not for diagnosing or treating an illness. Talk with your healthcare provider before changing prescribed treatment.

L-Lysine

Also called lysine | Amino Acids And Related Compounds

What Is It?

Lysine is one of the building blocks your body uses to make protein. Your body cannot make it, so you need it from food. Getting enough protein usually supplies enough lysine. Taking extra is different from meeting a normal food need. [1]

Why People Take It - And How Strong the Research Is

Preventing cold sores | MIXED, LIMITED EVIDENCE. Some small studies reported fewer outbreaks, but results are inconsistent. A Cochrane review found no convincing evidence of a preventive benefit. Reliable benefit and an effective dose have not been established. [2]

Treating an existing cold sore | NOT ENOUGH EVIDENCE. Lysine has not been reliably shown to make an active outbreak heal faster. Do not rely on it in place of antiviral medicines when those are needed. [2,3]

Energy, stress or bone health | UNPROVEN CLAIMS. Lysine has normal roles in the body, but this does not establish that extra supplements improve these problems in people who get enough from food. [1]

Does It Cure Herpes Or Prevent Spreading It?

No reliable evidence shows that lysine cures herpes or prevents transmission. Cold sores can spread to others. A clinician can advise on antiviral treatment and ways to reduce transmission. Cold sores and canker sores inside the mouth are different problems. [2,3]

Side Effects And Important Safety Concerns

Supplement studies report stomach symptoms such as nausea, abdominal discomfort or diarrhea. Long-term high doses should be avoided without medical supervision. Check first if you have kidney disease, diabetes or take medicines that lower blood sugar. [1,4]

Avoid use during pregnancy or breastfeeding unless your clinician specifically advises it. Ask before giving single amino acid supplements to a child. Seek prompt care for sores near an eye, severe symptoms, or outbreaks when your immune system is weakened. [1,3]

Questions To Ask Your Doctor Or Pharmacist

Are these actually cold sores? Would an antiviral work better? Is a trial of lysine reasonable? What benefit should I track, and when should I stop if it does not help?

Evidence labels describe research, not a guarantee of personal benefit or safety.

Where To Find Additional Information

1. [Stanford Medicine - Lysine](#)
2. [Cochrane - Preventing cold sores](#)
3. [Mayo Clinic - Cold sore diagnosis and treatment](#)
4. [PubMed - Review of lysine supplement safety](#)

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Magnesium Glycinate

Also called magnesium bisglycinate | Minerals

What Is It?

Magnesium glycinate combines magnesium, a mineral, with glycine, a building block of protein. Your body needs magnesium for muscles, nerves, bones and many other functions. This supplement is often promoted for muscle cramps, sleep and relaxation. [1,3]

Why People Take It - And How Strong the Research Is

Low magnesium | ESTABLISHED NEED TO CORRECT A DEFICIENCY. Supplements can help when magnesium intake or levels are too low. Not everyone needs extra magnesium; ask your clinician about the cause and treatment. [1]

Nighttime leg cramps (charley horses) | BENEFIT NOT ESTABLISHED. A 2020 Cochrane review found magnesium unlikely to provide meaningful prevention for common cramps in older adults. That does not rule out benefit when magnesium is truly low, but cramps alone do not prove a deficiency. Glycinate has not been shown to be a clearly better cramp treatment. [1,2]

Sleep problems | LIMITED, EARLY EVIDENCE. A 2025 trial found a small improvement in reported insomnia symptoms after four weeks of magnesium bisglycinate. This does not establish it as a reliable treatment for ongoing sleep problems. [3]

What these labels mean: They summarize the research, not a promise of benefit or safety for you.

What Does The Dose On The Label Mean?

Use the amount listed as **Magnesium** in the Supplement Facts box, not the total weight of magnesium glycinate advertised on the bottle. This is the amount of actual, or elemental, magnesium. Check the number of capsules per serving. [4]

Side Effects And Important Safety Concerns

Magnesium supplements can cause diarrhea, nausea or stomach cramps. Kidney disease increases the risk of dangerous magnesium buildup. Ask your clinician before use if you have kidney problems. [1]

For adults, the usual upper limit is **350 mg a day from supplements and medicines combined**, unless a clinician advises otherwise. This limit does not include magnesium naturally present in food. Count multivitamins, antacids and laxatives too. [1]

Magnesium can interfere with absorption of certain antibiotics and bone medicines. Ask your pharmacist how far apart to take them. Some water pills and long-term acid-reducing medicines can affect magnesium levels. [1,4]

Questions To Ask Your Doctor Or Pharmacist

Could my cramps have another cause? Do I need a magnesium test? Is my kidney function suitable? How much actual magnesium is in my serving? Does it need to be separated from my medicines?

Where To Find Additional Information

1. NIH ODS - Magnesium: consumer guide
2. Cochrane - Magnesium for muscle cramps (2020)
3. Research study - Magnesium bisglycinate and sleep (2025)
4. NIH ODS - Magnesium: detailed fact sheet

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Turmeric

Often sold as turmeric extract or curcumin | Herbs And Plant Extracts

What Is It?

Turmeric is the yellow spice used in many foods. Curcumin is one of its main ingredients. Supplements often contain much higher amounts than food. A capsule of concentrated extract is not the same as a sprinkle of spice. [1]

Why People Take It - And How Strong the Research Is

Knee arthritis pain | PROMISING BUT UNCERTAIN. Studies suggest possible improvements in pain and stiffness, but better research is needed. It has not been shown to rebuild worn joints. [1]

Fatty liver or cholesterol problems | NOT ENOUGH RELIABLE EVIDENCE. Early findings do not establish it as a treatment. Do not replace prescribed care. [1]

Does Added Black Pepper Make It Better?

Some products add piperine, an ingredient from black pepper, to increase absorption. Better absorption does not automatically mean better results or greater safety. Formulas differ, so results from one product may not apply to another. [1]

Side Effects And Important Safety Concerns

Possible effects include nausea, heartburn, stomach upset, diarrhea or constipation. Rare but serious liver injury has been reported, including with products designed for increased absorption. Stop the supplement and seek medical advice for dark urine, yellow skin or eyes, unusual tiredness or poor appetite. [1,2]

Ask a pharmacist to check your medicines, especially blood thinners. Discuss use first if you have gallstones, a blocked bile duct or liver disease. Avoid turmeric supplements during pregnancy unless your clinician advises otherwise; breastfeeding safety is uncertain. Normal food use differs from supplement use. [1,3]

Questions To Ask Your Doctor Or Pharmacist

Could this help my specific joint problem? Is my product safe with my medicines? Does it contain piperine? How long should I try it, and what improvement should I track?

Evidence labels describe research, not a guarantee of personal benefit or safety.

Where To Find Additional Information

1. [NIH / NCCIH - Turmeric](#)
2. [NIH LiverTox - Turmeric and liver injury](#)
3. [Memorial Sloan Kettering - Turmeric](#)

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