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Are You Taking Any of These Collagen Products?

Analysis by Dr. Joseph Mercola | May 03, 2026

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Some collagen supplements have been found to use low-grade “tannery” scraps, lack third-party testing, and contain undisclosed amounts of actual collagen. Independent testing has also identified heavy metal contaminants and cheap filler amino acids in some products
- Choose products that clearly disclose their collagen form, avoid vague proprietary blends, verify ingredient sources, and look for transparent quality testing — whether through named third-party certifications or publicly available certificates of analysis
- Homemade bone broth, meat cuts like shanks and oxtail, organ meats, and fish with skin provide natural sources of collagen in your diet
- Regular muscle meats contain minimal collagen and higher amounts of amino acids that may promote inflammation when unbalanced. In contrast, collagen is rich in glycine, proline, and hydroxyproline — amino acids associated with anti-inflammatory and tissue repair functions
- Aim for collagen to comprise roughly one-third of your daily protein intake (about 15% of daily calories), which mirrors collagen’s roughly 30% amount of total protein in the body

Adequate protein intake is important for optimal health. However, it’s not simply about eating enough protein, you also need to consider the kind of protein. I recommend getting one-third of your overall daily protein intake from collagen-rich sources, as 30% of your body is comprised of this protein. It provides structure for your skin and bones, and it even lines your blood vessels and organs.[1]

Unfortunately, many people aren't getting enough collagen from their diet, which has led to the creation of a wide variety of collagen supplements. These products certainly have their place, but not all collagen products are created equal. Choose unwisely, and poor efficacy could be the least of your problems.

The State of Collagen Supplements Today

As collagen has become more widely used, many supplement manufacturers have entered the space, with varying approaches to product quality and formulation. Here are some factors to keep in mind:

- **Lack of transparency in sourcing and processing —** Some lower-cost collagen supplements have been reported to use low-grade raw materials, including hides processed through industrial channels — so-called "tannery grade" hides. Reputable manufacturers typically use food-grade, traceable sources and disclose how their collagen is processed.

  Many high-quality products use hydrolyzed collagen peptides, which are broken down into smaller units for ease of digestion. Other formats, such as properly prepared bone broth collagen, may provide collagen in a whole-food matrix that some individuals prefer. The key is transparency in sourcing and processing.

- **Lack of toxicology testing —** Because many collagen products are sourced from conventionally raised animals, they likely contain heavy metals like lead, arsenic, and cadmium that accumulate in bones and hides. Independent testing reported by the Clean Label Project in 2020 found that 64% of the collagen brands tested had measurable arsenic, 37% contained lead, and 17% had cadmium.[2]

  Third-party labs are available to test for all of these contaminants, but many brands don't bother getting certified.

- **Label protein can be spiked —** When companies do test their products, some game the system. A common trick is “nitrogen spiking” — adding cheap amino acids (like glycine or taurine) that artificially boost the protein content reading. Lab tests measure total nitrogen to estimate protein; extra non-collagen aminos can inflate those numbers. The result? Even if a collagen powder’s lab report looks compliant, you might be ingesting fillers instead of functional collagen peptides.

  If a product advertises a certain amount of collagen but doesn’t list any protein on the nutrition label, the true collagen content may be negligible. Mislabeling like this means you could be paying for collagen you’re not actually getting.

- **Marine collagen is often a mystery mix —** Some marine collagen products may not clearly disclose the fish species or sourcing method. High-quality marine collagen products typically identify the species and origin of the fish used. If a label only states “marine collagen” without additional details on species or source, it may be worth taking a closer look at the product’s transparency and sourcing information.

- **Beware the add-ins —** Finally, consider looking closely at collagen products that include added flavors, sweeteners, or trendy ingredients, as these may shift the focus away from overall product quality. Some collagen powders, for example, contain added flavors or colorings to enhance taste or appearance, or are marketed as “keto collagen coffee creamer” that may include fillers.

  While these additions can be appealing, it’s still important to focus on what matters most: a clean, well-sourced collagen product with transparent labeling and appropriate quality testing.

An Overview of Popular Collagen Supplements

The table below is a summary of our review of some of the most popular collagen supplements sold on Amazon for quick comparison.

Product	Peptide type	Collagen per serving	3rd-party tested?	Red flags/additional comments
Alaya Multi Collagen	Multi (bovine, marine, chicken, eggshell)	8.6 g (per scoop)	No	Lack of testing. But company indicates product is made from grass fed, wild-caught, and hormone-free sources[3]
Ancient Nutrition Multi Collagen Protein*	Multi (bovine, chicken, fish, eggshell)	10 g	Yes[4]	Lacks specific testing dates; certificates of analysis are provided as “typical for all lots” only[5,6,7]
Anthony’s Collagen Peptide Powder	Bovine (Type I/III from bovine)	11 g	No[8]	n/a
Bulletproof Collagen Peptides	Bovine (grass fed)	20 g	No[9]	n/a

Product	Peptide type	Collagen per serving	3rd-party tested?	Red flags/additional comments
ForestLeaf Advanced Collagen	Bovine (hydrolyzed and grass fed)[10]	1 g (2 capsules)	No	Very low dose
Garden of Life Collagen Peptides	Bovine (grass fed pasture-raised)	20 g	Yes[11]	Contains additional probiotics
Great Lakes Wellness Collagen	Bovine (grass fed pasture-raised)	20 g	Yes[12]	Testing confirmed by IGEN
Live Conscious Collagen Peptides*	Bovine (pasture-raised)	15 g	Yes	Third-party tested but not specified[13]
Microingredients Multi Collagen	Multi (bovine, fish, poultry, eggshell)	~10.88 g	Yes	Third-party tested but not specified[14]
NativePath Collagen Peptides	Bovine (grass fed)	10 g	Yes	Met label claim; no major red flags besides lack of specific third-party certification[15]

Product	Peptide type	Collagen per serving	3rd-party tested?	Red flags/additional comments
Nature Made Collagen Gummies	Unknown (likely bovine or porcine)	100 mg (0.1 g)	No	Collagen content not disclosed as protein; extremely low dose[16]
Nature Target Multi Collagen Peptides	Multi (bovine, marine, poultry, and eggshell)	10 g	Yes	Source not disclosed; third-party tested but not verified[17]
Orgain Collagen Peptides	Bovine (grass fed)	18 g	No	No third-party certification, only internal testing[18]
Physician's Choice Collagen*	Bovine (grass fed) plus digestive enzymes and probiotic blend	7 g	Yes	Moderate dose; updated packaging recommends 2 to 3 times daily to achieve ideal daily intake. Third-party tested but not

Product	Peptide type	Collagen per serving	3rd-party tested?	Red flags/additional comments
				specified or shared[19]
Primal Harvest Primal Collagen	Bovine (grass fed)	10 g	No	No source transparency beyond “grass fed.” No other certifications[20]
Sports Research Collagen Peptides	Bovine	11 g	Yes (Certified NSF Gluten-Free)[21]	Company does extensive quality testing. Results can be viewed via their website[22]
Vitauthority Multi Collagen Burn	Multi (bovine, marine, poultry, and eggshell)	7.8 g	No	“Burn” marketing gimmick, which is their weight-loss blend[23]
Vital Proteins Collagen Peptides	Bovine (grass fed)	20 g	Yes (NSF Certified for Sport)[24]	Top quality product; no notable red flags
Vital Proteins Collagen	Bovine + hyaluronic	20 g	No	Contains added

Product	Peptide type	Collagen per serving	3rd-party tested?	Red flags/additional comments
Advanced	acid, vitamin C			nutrients; no major red flags except no testing certifications[25]
Vital Proteins Marine Collagen	Marine (wild-caught cod)	12 g	No	Testing is done internally only[26]
Vital Vitamins Multi Collagen Complex	Multi (bovine, poultry, marine, and eggshell)	1.6 g (capsules)	Yes	Collagen amount not disclosed as protein; very low dose per serving; uses “proprietary blend.” Third-party tested but not specified[27]
Wholesome Wellness Multi Collagen	Multi (bovine, marine, chicken, eggshell)	7.83 g	Yes	Third-party tested but not specified[28]
Youtheory Collagen	Not specified, but likely	6 g	No	Protein not listed on label

Product	Peptide type	Collagen per serving	3rd-party tested?	Red flags/additional comments
(Advanced Type 1, 2 and 3)	bovine			(collagen assumed: 5g to 6g); contains added vitamin C; no third-party testing[29]

*Right of Reply: Companies with red flag concerns were contacted for comment; received responses can be found at the bottom of this article.

How to Choose a High-Quality Collagen Supplement

The good news is that there are safe, effective collagen supplements out there — you just have to know what to look for. Research suggests that taking 2.5 to 10 grams of high-purity hydrolyzed collagen daily may support skin health,[30] joint comfort,[31] and nail strength.[32] These findings are drawn from clinical trials and systematic reviews in adults.

To get these benefits, you'll want a high-quality product that contains what it says and is free of unwanted extras. Here are my recommendations:

- **Check for third-party certification of purity —** Seals from organizations like National Sanitation Foundation (NSF), U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP), or Informed Sport provide a layer of assurance. Other brands may use independent third-party laboratories and provide certificates of analysis upon request. The important factor is verifiable quality testing.

- **Analyze the ingredients —** Look for a simple, transparent ingredient list. You want to see the source explicitly named. Avoid products that hide the collagen amount in a "proprietary blend." If the label doesn't reveal exactly how much collagen you get per serving (in grams) or doesn't identify the collagen source, put it back on the shelf.

  High-quality collagen will often specify the trademarked ingredient if it uses one — for instance, VERISOL® bovine peptides marketed for skin health, or Peptan® collagen. These branded collagen peptides usually have clinical studies behind them, which can be a useful sign.

- **Verify the source —** As noted, know where your collagen comes from — both the animal and how it was raised. High-quality collagen is typically derived from grass fed, pasture-raised cattle, wild-caught fish, or pastured chickens.

  Marine collagen should tell you what fish is used and, ideally, be sustainably sourced. Bovine collagen should ideally be grass fed and hormone-free. The source informs the collagen type. Bovine and fish mainly provide Type I (and III for bovine), which are great for skin, hair, nails, and bones, whereas chicken provides Type II, more targeted to joint cartilage. Some "multi-collagen" blends include all types, but again, only trust those that are upfront about ingredients.

- **Spot marketing red flags —** Don't fall for over-the-top claims like "age-defying," "miracle cure for wrinkles," or "instant joint repair." Also, be cautious of gimmicky combos such as collagen infused with weight-loss blends, or collagen coffee with a laundry list of additives. These trends are usually about riding multiple fads at once. You're better off with pure collagen and taking other supplements separately if needed.

How to Boost Your Collagen Intake Naturally

While a quality supplement can be useful, I’m a big proponent of food first. You can support your collagen intake through diet, and this approach offers a broader range of nutrients that work together for whole-body health.

I recommend planning your protein intake so that about 15% of your daily calories come from protein, and about one-third of that protein is collagen. Again, roughly 30% of your body's protein is collagen, so it makes sense to proportionally include these collagen-building amino acids in your diet. Here are four ways to do it:

1. **Make your own bone broth —** Take the time to learn how to simmer high-quality bone broth at home. It's one of the most concentrated natural dietary sources of collagen — when you slowly cook bones, tendons, and ligaments, the collagen breaks down into gelatin that enriches the broth. I recommend using bones from grass fed beef, pastured poultry, or wild-caught fish. Throw in vegetables and herbs for additional minerals and dietary fiber (plus flavor!).

2. **Eat collagen-rich cuts —** Don't shy away from cuts of meat that naturally contain a lot of connective tissue. Beef shanks, oxtail, osso buco, and pork knuckles are loaded with collagen that releases during cooking. These "odd bits" are often cheaper and, when cooked low and slow, they yield tender, flavorful meals and gelatin-rich sauces.

   If those are too adventurous for your palate, even choosing bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs is a good way to get extra collagen, provided you eat the skin and gnaw on the bones. The skin and connective tissue around the joints are rich in collagen. Slow-cooker stews, braised meats, and soups made with these cuts will also boost your collagen intake significantly.

3. **Consume organ meats —** Organ meats like liver and heart contain connective tissue and collagen, not to mention a wealth of micronutrients. Organ meat may not be everyone's favorite, but when prepared well, they can be delicious and incredibly nourishing. Always source organ meats from clean, pasture-raised animals to minimize toxin exposure.

4. **Leave the skin on your fish —** If you enjoy seafood, here's a simple hack: When you cook salmon, trout, or cod, eat the skin. The skin of fish (especially wild-caught fatty fish) is rich in Type I collagen. Crispy salmon skin can be a real treat when cooked

right.

Similarly, if you make fish soup or stew, include fish heads or skin in the broth. They'll dissolve down to add collagen (and great body) to your dish. Just be sure your fish is from unpolluted waters to avoid heavy metals. Smaller wild fish like sardines are a safe bet, and you can eat them whole, bones and skin included, for collagen and calcium.

Red Meat Doesn't Contain Much Collagen

You might be wondering why I keep recommending unusual cuts and organs to boost collagen, instead of the standard steak or chicken breast. The answer is simple — regular muscle meat (the red meat and white meat we commonly eat) doesn't have much connective tissue and thus is not a significant collagen source. You could eat plenty of beef or pork muscle and get lots of protein, but almost none of it would be collagen.

Eating enough muscle meat will meet your general protein needs, but it won't specifically support collagen-rich tissues. In fact, it's important not to confuse muscle protein with collagen — they serve different roles and have very different amino acid profiles.

Collagen is extraordinarily high in glycine, proline, and hydroxyproline (amino acids associated with anti-inflammatory and tissue repair properties), whereas muscle meats are higher in amino acids like methionine and cysteine, which, in excess, can be pro-inflammatory.

Amino Acid	% Gelatin Collagen	% Beef
Glycine	28	1.6
Proline	17	1.0
Hydroxyproline	14	0.3
Alanine	11	1.3
Methionine	0.8	3.2
Histidine	0.8	2.1
Tryptophan	0.4	1.3
Cysteine	Trace	0.2

The table above provides an overview of my argument — when comparing amino acid content, red meat contains very little glycine and proline (I highlight those as "good for you" in green), while collagen is mostly glycine and proline. Meanwhile, red meat is rich in tryptophan and cysteine (marked in red as they can promote inflammation if unbalanced), whereas collagen has virtually none.

In other words, simply eating a lot of steak won't give your body the collagen it needs for strong connective tissues, supple skin, or strong bones.[33] In fact, too much muscle meat without balancing collagen-rich foods might skew your amino acid intake toward a more inflammatory profile.

The great thing about collagen (and its cooked form, gelatin) is that it's extraordinarily low in those pro-inflammatory amino acids. This is one reason I personally aim to have about one-third of my daily protein come from collagen or gelatin sources.

Since embracing this balance — for example, I cut my egg and muscle meat intake in half and replaced that portion with collagen/gelatin — I've noticed improvements in joint comfort and recovery. This concept was inspired in part by the late Dr. Ray Peat, who emphasized the importance of balancing muscle meats with gelatin to support overall health.

Company Responses

- ***Ancient Nutrition —*** *Thank you so much for reaching out and for the opportunity to provide additional information for your upcoming article. To address your note regarding testing transparency — we're happy to share documentation confirming our third-party testing practices. Please find our Certificates of Analysis at the links below:*

    - ***Multi Collagen Protein Powder***
    - ***Multi Collagen Capsules***

    Additionally, lot numbers are printed on the bottom of each container (in white or yellow ink), alongside the product's expiration date.

- ***Physician's Choice —*** *Thanks for reaching out! Our grass fed bovine collagen delivers 7 grams of high-quality collagen per serving. In regards to the moderate dose, our updated packaging recommends using the product up to 2 to 3 times daily, allowing users to easily achieve an ideal daily intake to support optimal benefits.*

    We've formulated this product with a proprietary blend of digestive enzymes and probiotics designed to support nutrient absorption and promote overall digestive well-being.

    To ensure safety, purity, and potency, all of our products undergo third-party testing at cGMP-compliant laboratories that are ISO/IEC 17025 accredited. This internationally recognized standard confirms that the testing facilities operate with proven technical

competence and use validated analytical, chemical, and microbiological methods to deliver consistent, reliable results.

- ***Live Conscious —*** *Thank you for reaching out to Live Conscious. We appreciate your interest in our collagen product and the detailed review process you're undertaking at Mercola.com.*

  I understand the importance of transparency when evaluating product quality. Our collagen product undergoes rigorous manufacturing and testing in facilities that are cGMP-compliant, meeting U.S. federal safety regulations. Due to confidentiality agreements with our manufacturing and testing partners, we're unable to disclose the name of the third-party testing organization or provide supporting documentation.

  We remain committed to complying with quality standards and ensuring our products meet all regulatory requirements, and we hope this reassures you about our dedication to product integrity.

Note: *Some mechanistic and comparative findings in this article are drawn from nutritional biochemistry research, including amino acid profile analyses, that may not directly translate to established clinical outcomes in humans.*

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About Collagen Supplements

Q: Why is collagen important for health?

A: Collagen makes up about 30% of your body's total protein. It provides structural support for your skin, bones, tendons, ligaments, and the lining of blood vessels and organs. In essence, collagen is the "glue" that holds our tissues together. Getting enough collagen (and the amino acids within it) supports the integrity of connective tissues, helping keep skin elastic, joints resilient, bones strong, and arteries flexible.

Q: Why should I be cautious about collagen supplements?

A: Not all collagen supplements are created equal. Many are sourced from questionable materials like tannery-grade hides (industrial leather scraps) processed with harsh chemicals. Others contain fillers, heavy metals, or have much less actual collagen than the label claims. Quality varies widely across the collagen industry, making it important to review labels and sourcing details before selecting a product.

Q: How can I choose a trustworthy collagen supplement?

A: Look for supplements that explicitly state their collagen source and clearly describe the collagen form — whether hydrolyzed peptides or whole-food bone broth collagen. The label should list collagen content per serving in grams. Choose products that have been certified by an independent lab such as NSF or USP, which helps verify purity and content claims.

Avoid vague "proprietary blends" that don't tell you how much collagen you're getting. Also, be wary of products making miraculous claims or using lots of additives. Reputable brands tend to be transparent and focus on clinically backed dosages.

Q: Can I naturally boost my collagen without supplements?

A: Absolutely. Collagen-rich foods are readily available. Consuming homemade bone broth is a fantastic way to get collagen (from the simmered bones and connective tissue). Eating meat with the skin and connective tissue (like chicken thighs with skin, or slow-cooked tough cuts full of cartilage) will give you plenty of collagen.

Organ meats and dishes made with gelatin (like natural fruit gelatin desserts or aspic) also contribute collagen. And don't forget fish skin — crispy salmon skin and fish head soup are time-honored collagen sources. Aim to get a variety of these in your diet. I recommend that about one-third of your total protein intake be collagenous protein.

Q: Why isn't red meat sufficient for collagen?

A: Regular red meat (muscle meat) contains very little of the key amino acids needed to produce collagen. It's great for other proteins like hemoglobin and muscle fiber, but it won't replenish collagen stores. The primary amino acids in collagen — glycine, proline, and hydroxyproline — are only minimally present in lean muscle cuts.

Additionally, collagen's amino acids have special benefits. For example, glycine and proline are known to have anti-inflammatory properties. Many amino acids abundant in muscle meat (like methionine) can promote inflammation if not balanced with collagen's glycine. Thus, relying only on steaks and chicken breasts may not support skin, joints, and bones in the same way as collagen-rich foods. Consider maintaining a balanced protein intake.

This article is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute medical advice. Consult a qualified health care provider before making changes to your health regimen.

Sources and References

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