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Are Americans Finally Getting Smarter About Supplements?

Analysis by Dr. Joseph Mercola | November 03, 2026

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Americans are becoming more selective about supplements, shifting away from broad multivitamins and toward individual nutrients that match specific health goals, but choosing targeted products only benefits you when they address a genuine nutritional need
- Vitamin D, zinc and several other individual nutrients showed some of the largest increases in use over the past 25 years, reflecting a growing interest in personalized nutrition instead of one-size-fits-all supplementation
- The study tracked which supplements Americans buy, not whether those products improve health, making it important to base your decisions on high-quality scientific evidence rather than popularity or marketing claims
- Food remains the best source of most nutrients, with sensible sun exposure serving as the ideal source of vitamin D, while targeted supplements help fill important gaps that modern diets often leave behind, such as magnesium
- A simple supplement routine built around your daily meals is easier to maintain over the long term than juggling multiple bottles and complicated schedules, making it more likely you'll consistently receive the nutrients your body needs

Something interesting is happening in the supplement aisle, and it goes beyond the obvious fact that more Americans are reaching for bottles than ever before. The real story isn't how many supplements people buy but which ones they choose and why. An

analysis spanning more than two decades of federal health survey data reveals that the American approach to supplementation has fundamentally changed, and the shift says a great deal about how people now think about their own health.[1]

That evolution deserves a closer look, because buying a supplement and benefiting from one are two different things. The marketplace has become increasingly crowded and confusing, and the vast majority of purchasing decisions happen without professional guidance. What the latest research makes clear is that Americans are becoming far more intentional about supplementation, and understanding exactly how those habits changed is the first step toward making sure intention translates into genuine benefit.

The Biggest Shift Wasn't More Supplements but Smarter Targeting

In an analysis published in JAMA Network Open, researchers examined 11 cycles of the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) spanning 1999 through 2023 to understand how Americans' supplement habits changed over 25 years.[2] The nationally representative study included 63,442 adults age 20 and older, making it one of the most comprehensive evaluations of dietary supplement use in the U.S.

- **Americans moved away from broad multivitamins and toward targeted nutrients —** Conventional **multivitamin-multimineral products** steadily lost popularity while individually selected vitamins and minerals became much more common. Multivitamin use declined from 35% of adults in 1999-2000 to 31% in 2021-2023, while use of individual nutrients continued to climb.

  Instead of buying one product that contained dozens of ingredients, more Americans chose supplements designed for specific goals. That trend suggests consumers increasingly wanted personalized nutritional support instead of blanket coverage. It's worth asking whether each supplement in your routine fills a genuine nutritional need or whether it landed in your cabinet because of clever marketing.

- **Vitamin D, zinc and several individual nutrients experienced the strongest growth —** When researchers excluded multivitamins and focused only on individually purchased nutrients, vitamin D showed one of the largest increases in the entire study, rising from 5.1% of adults to 29%. Zinc more than doubled, increasing from 4.6% to 11%. Researchers also documented substantial increases in vitamin K, vitamin B12, biotin, magnesium, potassium, copper, and iron.*

  At the same time, several older specialty minerals, including nickel, tin, silicon, vanadium, chromium and boron, became less common. Those shifting patterns show consumers gravitating toward nutrients tied to specific health concerns rather than broad-spectrum coverage.

- **Consumers increasingly purchased supplements for specific health goals rather than general wellness —** The researchers found growing use of products such as collagen, hyaluronic acid, ashwagandha, elderberry and prebiotic or probiotic supplements. Many of these products were uncommon when the study began but became increasingly popular during the later survey years.

  The fastest-growing categories centered on immune health, digestive health, skin health, joint support and healthy aging. Those purchases reflect changing consumer priorities, but the researchers emphasized that popularity alone doesn't establish effectiveness. Choosing a supplement based on evidence instead of advertising remains one of the smartest decisions you can make.

- **Supplement habits changed gradually over many years rather than overnight —** Statistical analyses showed that many supplement categories remained relatively stable until roughly 2009 through 2012 before increasing much more rapidly.* That means today's supplement marketplace reflects a long-term shift in consumer behavior rather than a short-lived fad.

  Researchers also observed additional increases during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly for vitamins, minerals and products commonly promoted for immune health, including zinc and elderberry. Rather than creating entirely new trends, the

pandemic accelerated purchasing habits that were already developing.

- **The study revealed who buys supplements but not whether the supplements improved health —** The researchers carefully documented which supplements Americans used and how those choices changed over time, but they didn't evaluate whether those products prevented disease, improved health or increased longevity. That difference matters because widespread use doesn't automatically prove effectiveness.

  The researchers specifically noted that continued studies are needed to determine which supplements truly deliver meaningful health benefits.

- **The findings encourage you to evaluate every supplement with a clear purpose —** The study paints a detailed picture of how Americans think about supplementation. Consumers increasingly select products aimed at specific goals instead of relying on one-size-fits-all multivitamins, showing that people are becoming more intentional with their choices.

  This is a positive direction, provided those decisions are grounded in science instead of marketing. Before adding another supplement to your routine, identify the nutritional gap you're trying to fill and look for solid evidence that the ingredient addresses that specific need.

**These findings are from research conducted in clinical settings. Results may not apply to all individuals.*

Build Your Supplement Plan Around Real Nutrition

The research shows that Americans have become more selective about supplements, but the study's authors acknowledge that selectivity alone doesn't guarantee better health. That gap between intention and outcome is exactly where your decisions matter most. The data confirms that people are paying closer attention to what they take and why — the question now is whether that attention is pointed in the right direction.

Building a supplement plan around real nutritional needs instead of marketplace momentum is how you turn a smarter instinct into a measurable advantage. I recommend building your health from the ground up instead of collecting bottles based on the latest trend. Food remains the foundation of good nutrition, while supplements fill specific gaps when your diet or lifestyle falls short.

1. **Start with food and sunlight whenever possible —** I view supplements as exactly what their name implies — additions to an already healthy lifestyle, not replacements for one. Nutrient-dense foods provide vitamins, minerals and thousands of beneficial compounds that work together in ways isolated nutrients can't. In the case of vitamin D, regular, sensible sun exposure remains the ideal source.

   Build your meals around high-quality protein, whole fruit and other minimally processed foods first, then use supplements to address nutrients that remain difficult to obtain.

2. **Supplement the nutrients that are hardest to get from modern diets —** Magnesium is one of the clearest exceptions to the food-first approach because decades of intensive farming have reduced the amount available in many foods. Even if you eat well, it's difficult to get enough from diet alone. That's why I often recommend magnesium glycinate or malate.

   Glycinate tends to suit magnesium-sensitive individuals and support nighttime recovery, while malate is better suited to muscle function and energy production.

3. **Choose supplements that solve your problem instead of following the latest trend —** The study found that Americans increasingly purchase supplements for immune health, gut health, skin, joints, and healthy aging. That doesn't mean every popular product belongs in your routine. Before buying another supplement, identify the nutritional gap or health goal you want to address.

If you aren't sure where your biggest nutritional gaps lie, working with a knowledgeable holistic health practitioner helps you identify the nutrients that best fit your individual needs. A supplement deserves a place in your routine because it meets a genuine need, not because it dominates social media or advertising.

4. **Make your supplement routine almost effortless —** Even the highest-quality supplement offers little benefit if your routine is too complicated to maintain. Multiple bottles, handfuls of capsules, and staggered dosing schedules create friction that quietly erodes consistency. That's one reason many supplement makers are reformulating their products as powders wherever the ingredients allow it.

   Mixing a powder into a homemade smoothie or another meal you already eat ties supplementation to a habit you already perform every day. Instead of creating another pill-taking ritual, you simply make targeted nutrition part of your daily meals.

5. **Fix the foundations that no supplement can replace —** Before spending another dollar on a new supplement, ask whether the basics are in order. Poor sleep can undermine magnesium retention, disrupt blood sugar regulation and accelerate the very aging processes people try to address with supplements.

   Sedentary habits can blunt nutrient absorption and reduce circulation to the tissues where vitamins and minerals do their work. A diet built on processed food tends to create deficits faster than any capsule can fill them.

   Supplements generally perform best when the body receiving them is already functioning well. Prioritize consistent sleep, daily movement, and meals built around whole foods first — those three changes alone can resolve many of the gaps people try to supplement their way around.

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

FAQs About US Supplement Trends

Q: Why are fewer Americans relying on multivitamins today?

A: More people are moving away from one-size-fits-all multivitamins and choosing individual nutrients that match specific health goals, such as supporting immune function, healthy aging or digestive health. This shift reflects a growing interest in more personalized nutrition rather than taking a broad formula that includes nutrients you might not need.

Q: Does a supplement's popularity mean it actually works?

A: No. A product's popularity only shows that more people are buying it. It doesn't prove the supplement improves health or prevents disease. Before adding any supplement to your routine, look for strong scientific evidence that it addresses your specific nutritional needs instead of relying on marketing claims or social media trends.

Q: What's the best way to decide which supplements are right for me?

A: Start by identifying the nutritional gap or health goal you want to address instead of buying supplements because they're fashionable. A nutrient-dense diet and healthy lifestyle provide the foundation, while targeted supplements help fill specific gaps. If you're unsure which nutrients you need, a knowledgeable holistic health practitioner helps you create a plan based on your individual circumstances.

Q: Should I try to get nutrients from food or supplements first?

A: Food remains the best source of most vitamins and minerals because it provides nutrients in the forms your body has used throughout human history. Sensible sun exposure is also the preferred way to optimize vitamin D. Supplements serve as targeted tools when food or lifestyle alone doesn't provide enough of a particular nutrient, such as magnesium, which has become more difficult to obtain from modern diets because of depleted soils.

Q: How can I make my supplement routine easier to stick with?

A: Keep your routine as simple as possible. Tying supplements to habits you already have — such as mixing a powdered supplement into a homemade smoothie — makes consistency much easier than managing multiple bottles and complicated dosing schedules. The easier your routine becomes, the more likely you'll continue it over the long term.

Sources and References

- [1, 2] JAMA Network Open June 15, 2026;9;(6):e2619291