

the decoder

MULTIVITAMINS

Reality: Many women don't get all the nutrients they need from their diets. A multivitamin can help cover your bases. Here, experts sort through all the options.



01



basic multivitamins

WHAT THEY ARE: One-pill wonders that offer 100 percent of the recommended daily allowance (RDA), as suggested by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, for many important vitamins.

BENEFITS: They give you much of what you need in a day, including vitamins A, C, D, and E, B vitamins, and folic acid. Bonus: You have only one tablet to remember to

take and swallow. Try **One A Day Essential Multivitamin** (\$10 for 130 tablets, drugstore.com).

KEEP IN MIND: Some single pills also include minerals, such as iron, calcium, and magnesium. But their levels can fall short of what's recommended. The RDA for calcium, for example, is 1,000 to 1,200 milligrams. But because calcium is bulky, including that much would make for one giant pill. Therefore an additional mineral supplement may be wise in some cases. (Note: Check with your doctor before introducing any vitamins or supplements into your diet.)



02

food-based multivitamins

WHAT THEY ARE: Vitamins combined with powdered whole foods. “The manufacturers basically break down vegetables, fruits, and other food ingredients, add vitamins, and formulate that into capsules,” explains Preeti Kulkarni, a naturopathic doctor in Los Gatos, California.

BENEFITS: Less chance of stomach upset. “Since you’re combining the vitamins with real food,” says Kulkarni, “they will be absorbed better and shouldn’t cause gastric distress.” Try **New Chapter Organics Only One** (\$50 for 90 tablets, newchapter.com for stores).

KEEP IN MIND: Despite the name, the vitamins you’re getting aren’t necessarily more natural; often they’re the same synthetically produced versions as in basic multis.



It’s OK to take these on an empty stomach.

03

adult chewable multivitamins

WHAT THEY ARE: Single pills in a form you don’t have to swallow whole.

BENEFITS: Not having to force down large pills, which is a boon to those who have trouble swallowing tablets or who experience stomach problems when they do. Try **Centrum Chewables** (\$7 for 50 tablets, drugstore.com).

KEEP IN MIND: These aren’t the same as the gummy or chewable vitamins that kids take. “The levels of vitamins in children’s formulas won’t give adults all they need,” says Tara Gidus, a registered dietitian in Orlando, Florida. (Too bad, considering kids’ chewables tend to taste better.)



04

women’s multivitamins

WHAT THEY ARE: Souped-up multivitamins that contain larger amounts of nutrients that many women require.

BENEFITS: They help you get the RDA of such vitamins and minerals as folic acid, calcium, and iron. Try **Nature Made Multi for Her** (\$11 for 90 tablets, walgreens.com).

KEEP IN MIND: These formulas come in age-specific varieties, too. Ones for women over 50, for instance, may contain higher levels of vitamins C and E and less iron.



Iron can irritate the stomach, so take these with a meal.

05

targeted multivitamins

WHAT THEY ARE: Pills formulated for a specific population, such as pregnant women or those worried about a particular condition (like heart disease, osteoporosis, or eye health).

BENEFITS: Certain people require more or less of certain nutrients. Pregnant women, for instance, are advised to take more folic acid to help prevent birth defects. Consider **Twin-lab Pre-Natal Care Multi Vitamin** (\$26 for 120 capsules, vitaminshoppe.com).

KEEP IN MIND: Some specialty multis (such as those touted to help joints) don’t have substantial science behind them. Although they’re probably not harmful, talk to your doctor before taking them.



06

powdered multivitamins

WHAT THEY ARE: Drink mixes you stir into a liquid.

BENEFITS: Often just one heaping tablespoon contains the vitamins and minerals that you would get from several pills. “Tablets contain fillers and binding agents that the body has to break down before the nutrients can be absorbed,” says Kulkarni. “Powders don’t require these.” Try **All One Original Formula** (\$48 for a 30-day supply, all-one.com).

KEEP IN MIND: Many powders have a bitter aftertaste, says Gidus. Mixing them with juice (not water) may help.



You can blend these with yogurt and fruit to make a smoothie.

07

multi-pill packs

WHAT THEY ARE: Individual daily packets that hold several pills designed to work together.

BENEFITS: You can get higher doses of vitamin D, calcium, and omega-3 fatty acids, which are often not present in basic multivitamins. Try **GNC Wellbeing be-Wholesome Health & Beauty Vitapak** (\$60 for 30 packs, gnc.com).

KEEP IN MIND: Some have megadoses, which in the case of vitamins A, D, and E can be toxic, says Davis Liu, a family physician in Roseville, California. Check the website of the Institute of Medicine (iom.edu/dri) for the maximum levels of vitamins and minerals that can be safely consumed.

