

What Are Zinc Supplements Good For? Benefits and More



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[Types](#) [Benefits](#) [Dosage](#) [Safety & Side Effects](#) [Bottom Line](#)

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Zinc is an essential micronutrient that is crucial to almost every aspect of your health.

It's second only to iron as the most abundant trace mineral in your body (1).

Available in many different forms, zinc supplements are often used to treat an array of ailments.

Research shows that this mineral may enhance immune function, stabilize blood sugar levels, and help keep your skin, eyes, and heart healthy.

This article reviews the types, benefits, dosage recommendations, and potential side effects of zinc supplements.



Types of Zinc Supplements

When choosing a zinc supplement, you'll likely notice that there are many different types available.

These various forms of [zinc](#) impact health in distinct ways.

Here are a few you might find on the market:

- **Zinc gluconate:** As one of the most common over-the-counter forms of zinc, zinc gluconate is often used in cold remedies, such as lozenges and nasal sprays (2).
- **Zinc acetate:** Like zinc gluconate, zinc acetate is often added to cold lozenges to reduce symptoms and speed up the rate of recovery (3).
- **Zinc sulfate:** In addition to helping prevent zinc deficiency, zinc sulfate has been shown to reduce the severity of acne (4).
- **Zinc picolinate:** Some research suggests that your body may absorb this form better than other types of zinc, including zinc gluconate and zinc citrate (5).
- **Zinc orotate:** This form is bound to orotic acid and one of the most common types of zinc supplements on the market (6).
- **Zinc citrate:** One study showed that this type of zinc supplement is as well-absorbed as zinc gluconate but has a less bitter, more appealing taste (7).

Because it's one of the most widely available and cost-effective forms of zinc, zinc gluconate can be a good option to help bump up your intake without breaking your bank.

However, if you're able to invest a bit more, zinc picolinate may be better absorbed.

Available in capsule, tablet, and lozenge form, there are plenty of options to get your daily dose of zinc — regardless of the type you choose.

However, keep in mind that nasal sprays containing zinc have been linked to loss of smell and should be avoided (8, 9).

SUMMARY

There are several forms of zinc supplements that impact your health in unique ways. They're generally available in capsule, tablet, and lozenge form. Zinc-containing nasal sprays should be avoided.

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Potential Benefits

Zinc is vital for many aspects of health and has been associated with a variety of benefits.

May Improve Immune Function

Many over-the-counter medications and natural remedies feature zinc due to its ability to boost immune function and [fight inflammation](#).

One review of seven studies showed that zinc lozenges containing 80-92 mg of zinc may reduce common cold duration by up to 33% (10).

Zinc may also act as an antioxidant, helping reduce inflammation and protecting against chronic conditions, such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes (11, 12).

One study in 50 older adults found that taking 45 mg of zinc gluconate for one year decreased several markers of inflammation and reduced the frequency of infections (13).

May Promote Blood Sugar Control

Zinc is well known for its role in [blood sugar control](#) and insulin secretion. Insulin is the hormone responsible for transporting sugar from your bloodstream to your tissues ([14](#)).

Some research suggests that zinc may help keep blood sugar levels steady and improve your body's sensitivity to insulin.

One review reported that zinc supplements were effective at enhancing both short-term and long-term blood sugar control in people with diabetes ([15](#)).

Other research shows that zinc may help reduce insulin resistance, which can improve your body's ability to use insulin efficiently to maintain normal blood sugar levels ([16](#), [17](#)).

Helps Fight Acne

Zinc supplements are often used to promote skin health and treat common skin conditions like [acne](#) ([18](#)).

Zinc sulfate has been shown to be especially useful for decreasing symptoms of severe acne ([4](#)).

A 3-month study in 332 people found that taking 30 mg of elemental zinc — a term that refers to the actual amount of zinc found in a supplement — was effective at treating inflammatory acne ([19](#)).

Zinc supplements are also often favored over other treatment methods as they're inexpensive, effective, and associated with far fewer side effects ([18](#)).

May Improve Heart Health

Heart disease is a serious problem, accounting for roughly 33% of deaths worldwide ([20](#)).

Some research shows that taking zinc may improve several risk factors for heart disease and may even [lower triglyceride](#) and cholesterol levels.

A review of 24 studies found that zinc supplements helped decrease levels of total and "bad" LDL cholesterol, as well as blood triglycerides, which could potentially aid in preventing heart disease ([21](#)).

Additionally, one study in 40 young women showed that higher intakes of zinc were linked to lower levels of systolic blood pressure (the top number of a reading) (22).

However, research evaluating the effects of supplements on blood pressure is limited (22).

Other research suggests that low levels of serum zinc may be associated with a higher risk of coronary heart disease, but findings remain inconclusive (23).

Slows Macular Degeneration

Macular degeneration is a common eye disease and one of the leading causes of vision loss around the globe (24).

Zinc supplements are often used to slow the progression of age-related macular degeneration (AMD) and help protect against vision loss and blindness.

One study in 72 people with AMD showed that taking 50 mg of zinc sulfate daily for three months slowed the progression of the disease (25).

Similarly, another review of 10 studies reported that supplementing with zinc was effective at reducing the risk of progression to advanced macular degeneration (26).

However, other studies in the review suggested that zinc supplements alone may not produce significant [vision improvements](#) and should be paired with other treatment options to maximize results (26).

SUMMARY

Zinc may reduce the duration of cold symptoms, support blood sugar control, improve severe and inflammatory acne, decrease heart disease risk, and slow the progression of macular degeneration.

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Dosage

How much zinc you should take per day depends on the type, as each supplement contains a different amount of elemental zinc.

For example, zinc sulfate consists of about 23% elemental zinc, so 220 mg of zinc sulfate would equate to about 50 mg of zinc (27).

This amount is usually listed on the label of your supplement, making it easy to determine how much you should take to meet your daily needs.

For adults, the recommended daily dosage is typically 15–30 mg of elemental zinc (4, 28).

Higher doses have been used for treating certain conditions, including acne, diarrhea, and respiratory infections.

However, due to the potential side effects associated with [excess zinc consumption](#), it's best not to exceed the upper limit of 40 mg per day — unless under medical supervision (27).

SUMMARY

Different zinc supplements contain varying concentrations of elemental zinc. The recommended dosage for daily supplements is 15–30 mg.

Safety and Side Effects

When used as directed, zinc supplements can be a safe and effective way to increase your zinc intake and improve several aspects of your health.

However, they have been associated with adverse side effects, including [nausea](#), vomiting, diarrhea, and stomach pain ([29](#), [30](#)).

Exceeding 40 mg per day of elemental zinc can cause flu-like symptoms, such as fever, coughing, headache, and [fatigue](#) ([31](#)).

Zinc can also interfere with your body's ability to absorb copper, potentially leading to a deficiency in this key mineral over time ([32](#)).

Furthermore, zinc supplements have been shown to interfere with the absorption of certain antibiotics, reducing their effectiveness if taken at the same time ([27](#)).

To reduce your risk of side effects, stick to the recommended dosage and avoid exceeding the tolerable upper limit of 40 mg per day — unless under medical supervision.

If you experience any negative side effects after taking zinc supplements, decrease your dosage and consider consulting with your healthcare professional if symptoms persist.

SUMMARY

Zinc can cause negative side effects, including digestive issues and flu-like symptoms. It may also interfere with the absorption of copper and reduce the effectiveness of certain antibiotics.

The Bottom Line

Zinc is a mineral essential to many aspects of health.

Supplementing with 15–30 mg of elemental zinc daily may improve immunity, blood sugar levels, and eye, heart, and skin health. Be sure not to exceed the upper limit of 40 mg.

Zinc's side effects include digestive issues, flu-like symptoms, and reduced copper absorption and antibiotic effectiveness.

Zinc supplements are widely available [online](#), at your local health store, or pharmacy.

Plus, if you want to try and increase your zinc intake [through your diet](#), many foods are rich in this mineral, such as nuts, seeds, legumes, meat, seafood, and dairy.