5 things you should know before choosing a daily supplement Transcript

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Introduction: What to Know Before Taking Supplements

Hi, I'm Dr. Mike Daniels with We Treat Feet Podiatry. Today I want to walk you through five things you should know before you start taking a daily supplement, not what the commercials tell you, what actually matters in real life.

One, know whether you actually need it. Most people start supplements backwards. They hear a friend talking about vitamin X, see an ad, or watch a TikTok, and suddenly they're swallowing a handful of pills every morning.

1. Determine Whether You Actually Need a Supplement

That's not a plan, that's gambling. If you can, start with lab work. Find out what's actually low before you add anything. I've had patients taking iron for years because women need more iron and they were never anemic.

The real problem was severe vitamin D deficiency that nobody checked and that was driving fatigue and poor wound healing. If labs aren't an option, at least be brutally honest about your diet, your sun exposure, you age, and your medical issues.

Don't just copy what someone else is taking and hope for the best. Two, quality matters more than you think. Not all supplements are created equal. They're not regulated like prescription drugs, which means quality is all over the map.

2. Why Supplement Quality Matters

Some bottles don't have what the label claims, some have extra fillers or contaminants, so yes, the cheap big bottle from the bargain bin might actually be a waste of money.

When my patients ask what to look for, I tell them, look to third party testing on the labels, things like USP, NSF, or Consumer Lab, that at least tells you somebody checked what's in there.

You're better off paying a bit more for something your body can actually use than saving a few dollars on something that never moves your labs or your symptoms?

Three, timing and interactions actually matter. You can take the right supplement and still get very little benefit if you take it the wrong way. A few common mistakes I see all the time.

Taking calcium and iron together. Calcium blocks iron absorption. taking vitamin D on an empty stomach with just water. It's a fat soluble vitamin. it needs to be taken with food that has some fat in it.

3. Timing and Medication Interactions

Taking magnesium too close to certain antibiotics, which can interfere with how the medication works. People then get frustrated, I've been on this stuff for months and my numbers aren't changing, and it's not always the supplement.

Sometimes it is how and when you're taking it. If you are on multiple medications and supplements, ask your doctor or pharmacist to help you map out timing.

It makes a difference. Four, more is not better and can be harmful. This is a big one. The typical mindset is, if a little is good, More must be great.

That's how people end up in trouble. Fat soluble vitamins like A, D, E, and K build up in the body. I've seen people take 10,000 units of vitamin D every day for years without any blood work.

They feel fine until suddenly they've got high calcium levels, kidney stones, or other problems.

4. Why More Is Not Better

Even with water soluable vitamins you can still overdo it. Best case scenario you're just making very expensive urine. Worst case you create new imbalances like taking so much zinc that you block copper absorption.

Supplements are not the more the better. Doses should be based on actual lab values or a clear clinical reason, not whatever the largest number on the shelf happens to be.

Five, supplements don't fix a bad lifestyle. This is the part nobody wants to hear. You cannot out supplement a lousy diet, no exercise, poor sleep and smoking.

There is no capsule that erases all of that. Supplements are meant to fill gaps when you've already done what you reasonably can with food and lifestyle in my wound care patients.

I see this all the time.

5. Supplements Can't Replace a Healthy Lifestyle

Yes, they're low in vitamin D or protein, and we correct that, but they're also barely eating real food, sleeping a few hours a night, and sitting most of the day.

The supplements help, but the real progress happens when the basics improve. Think of supplements as support, not a shortcut. They should be the last 10-15%, not the foundation.

If there's one thing I want you to remember, it's this. Don't take supplements reactively because you're scared or because something is trending. Figure out what you actually need.

Choose decent quality. Take it the right way and give it time. And please, tell your healthcare providers what you're taking. Just a supplement can still interact with your medications and your conditions.

Key Takeaways and Closing Advice

I'm Dr. Mike Daniels with We Treat Feet Podiatry. If you found this helpful, share it with someone who's staring at a wall of supplement bottles and doesn't know where to start.