



Collagen Supplements — the Good, the Bad, and the In-Between

Betty Chaffee/ June 15, 2022/ [Dietary Supplements](#)/ [2 comments](#)

Somehow I missed the collagen boat. Collagen supplements have become more and more popular over recent years, but it's only the last couple of months that I've had questions about them from readers. They're marketed to do everything from keeping skin looking younger to relieving the pain of osteoarthritis, and lots in between. What is collagen? What are its health benefits? Should we all be taking collagen supplements? Well, let's explore!

What is collagen?

[Collagen](#) is a protein (well, actually a group of proteins) that's abundant in the human body. In fact, it makes up about a third of the protein in our bodies. Some types of collagen give our skin strength and flexibility, other types provide structure to bones, tendons, and cartilage. Still others improve the strength and elasticity of hair and nails. When we eat protein in meats and other foods, our bodies break it down into chains of amino acids (called *peptides*). Then those peptides are put back together in different ways to make the many types of collagen that strengthen the body's framework.

Like so many other aspects of aging, the body is way better at making collagen when we're young, less so as we get older. So even if we eat the same foods, our bodies just aren't as efficient at using them to make collagen when we get older. We end up with skin that wrinkles and tears more easily, bones that become weaker, joint discomfort, and sometimes thinning hair and nails. That's all a part of normal aging, but many of us aren't all that happy about it.

What are collagen supplements used for?

Collagen has been used for many years to soften the effect of aging on skin and to improve nail strength. And those are still its most common uses. But given what collagen does in the human body, there are many other theories about its usefulness. Collagen has been tested as a treatment for osteoarthritis pain, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis. It's also been

theorized to improve muscle mass, improve brain function, and promote weight loss. But does the theory result in real-world improvements in health?

What the research says.

There's been a fair amount of research looking at the possible benefits of collagen supplements. Check out these articles from [WebMD](#), [HealthLine](#), and [MD Anderson hospital](#) for easy-to-read, objective summaries. Overall the research leaves lots of questions. Much of the research wasn't done with sufficient scientific rigor. Other research reported cosmetic and/or health outcomes of questionable significance.

For example, there are a fair number of studies showing that collagen has a beneficial effect on skin hydration and elasticity. When measuring the effect on wrinkles, some studies found a decrease in wrinkles of 13-20%. That may be a very real change. But when you think about it in a different way, it means that if I start with 30 wrinkles on my face, I end up with 24-26 wrinkles. Is that a noticeable change? Enough to warrant taking a supplement every day? Maybe to some people, maybe not to others.

We find a similar situation with some research that was done using collagen supplements to prevent heart disease. The study showed some very real and positive changes in arterial stiffness and cholesterol levels, among other things. But whether those changes will translate into a difference in the actual health of the patients is still unknown.

Bottom line, the theories behind using collagen hold lots of promise. There may be a role, or even several roles, for collagen supplements in improving health. But right now, a lot more research of good quality is needed to define those roles.

Diet vs Supplements



If you've been a reader of the BetterMyMeds blog for long, you already know I'm a big fan of [using a balanced diet instead of supplements](#) to stay as healthy as possible. Not only does research indicate that a



balanced diet is more effective at optimizing health than supplements, it's TASTIER and more satisfying! Even better, eating a balanced diet can keep other chronic health problems at bay or in check. It's the most natural way to stay healthy. Specifically, a diet with [adequate amounts of protein, fruits and vegetables](#) will give your body the building blocks it needs to make collagen.



But reality is, well, real. Nutritious food is expensive. It also takes time to cook. And you have to enjoy eating it. For those who know that a balanced diet is not a realistic goal, and believe collagen is worth trying, supplements are available.

Collagen supplements

Interestingly, collagen supplements aren't actually collagen. The powders and capsules that are marketed contain the peptides or amino acids that make up collagen. So you'll see on the list of ingredients the term "hydrolyzed collagen" for most products. Other names you might see are "collagen hydrolysate" or "collagen peptides". What you're taking are the *building blocks* of collagen. And those building blocks can be used to make all sorts of different proteins that your body needs. There's no way to make sure your body makes the collagen that will give you the effect you're looking for. Whether your body uses those building blocks to make the collagen that will decrease wrinkles in the skin or uses them to strengthen your tendons isn't up to you. Your body gets to decide how to use those building blocks.

The [dose](#) of collagen peptides used in the research varied from 2.5 to 10 grams daily. The supplements seem to be safe, though there are those with concerns about [contaminants](#) in products made from animal bones. If you decide to try it, be sure to purchase a product that's reliably [pure and potent](#). Set a goal for results you hope to achieve, then see if you meet it. You'll know at that point whether you want to keep using it.

Have you used collagen supplements?

If you have experience with collagen supplements, good or not-so-good, or have other comments or questions please comment in the space below. Or feel free to [contact us](#) directly at **BetterMyMeds**. We love hearing from you!



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