

**Magnesium – A Mineral We Can’t Do Without**

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Magnesium is a mineral that’s been getting a lot more attention in recent years. If you subscribe to any health newsletters you may have seen an article or two about it. But if not, the idea that we should wonder if we're getting enough of it may be completely new to you. I know it was to me, until several months ago. At that time I began to see more use of magnesium supplements and became curious. I’ll share what I learned with you in this post.

***Magnesium’s Role in the Body***

Our bodies operate in fascinating ways. So much is going on to keep us not only alive, but physically and mentally active. Heart beating, muscles engaged, brain alert (well, most of the time, anyway). Nutrients digested, sounds picked up – we can’t possibly keep track of all the chemical, physical, and electrical activity that makes all that happen. There are many different minerals, vitamins and proteins that work together to keep things moving. And magnesium is an important part of the chain.

[Magnesium is essential](https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/Magnesium-Consumer/#:~:text=Magnesium%20is%20a%20nutrient%20that,protein%2C%20bone%2C%20and%20DNA.) for the activity of more than 75% of enzymatic reactions in the body. It helps to make bones strong and ensure that muscles and nerves function well. It also regulates blood sugar and blood pressure, which can decrease the risk of heart disease. The jury is still out on how much it helps our brains function, allows for better sleep, and decreases the likelihood of depression and anxiety. But it’s safe to say that the more we learn about magnesium, the clearer it is that we need to pay attention to our intake.

***So what’s the big deal?***

In the past, it was pretty easy to get plenty of magnesium from a[balanced diet](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/10-foods-high-in-magnesium#leafy-greens)., since it's contained in so many foods. The problem is that [farming practices have changed the magnesium content of soil over many years](https://www.nutriadvanced.co.uk/news/magnesium-why-aren-t-we-getting-enough/#:~:text=In%20addition%2C%20there%20are%20a,can%20interfere%20with%20magnesium%20absorption.&text=Poor%20crop%20quality%20and%20modern,magnesium%20through%20dietary%20sources%20alone). And that means that plants grown in some soils end up having a much lower content than in the past. Experts have found over the past decade or two that the majority of Americans aren’t getting enough magnesium in their diet because of that.

We also know that certain medications can deplete magnesium stores. Regular use of [proton-pump inhibitors](https://www.fda.gov/drugs/drug-safety-and-availability/fda-drug-safety-communication-low-magnesium-levels-can-be-associated-long-term-use-proton-pump) for heartburn (omeprazole, pantoprazole and others) can make it harder for the body to absorb it from foods. Diuretics (water pills) can cause the kidneys to eliminate it more quickly. Alcohol use disorder is more common now, too – that can result in low intake of healthy foods as well as an increase in elimination of magnesium. And other health disorders such as uncontrolled diabetes can increase its elimination.

All these things put together have drastically increased the number of people suffering from magnesium deficiencies. And because your body stores most of this mineral away from the bloodstream, it’s not often noticed on routine testing. So because we can’t be sure our food contains adequate magnesium, and deficiencies aren’t usually part of routine health screening, it’s reasonable to wonder if we’re at risk for problems.

***Symptoms of magnesium deficiency***

Magnesium deficiency can often go unnoticed. It doesn’t always result in obvious problems. If you aren’t getting enough magnesium, you may suffer fatigue, muscle cramps, sleeplessness, or anxiety. In more severe cases there can even be an abnormal heart rhythm. But many people can be deficient in this mineral for a long time without knowing it.

The absence of obvious symptoms on a daily basis doesn’t mean that all’s well, though. Decreased magnesium may result in a higher risk of osteoporosis, heart rhythm problems, and inability to regulate other electrolytes, like potassium. There’s some evidence to suggest that adequate levels allow for better sleep patterns, and improved muscle and nerve function. We’re learning more every day about the importance of magnesium.

***Recommended daily allowance***

 Adults should get 320mg (women) to 420mg (men) of magnesium each day. Though many foods typically contain it, the way they’re grown can make the content variable. As we’ve said before in these posts, one of the best ways to stay healthy is to eat a balanced diet. And that’s true with regard to magnesium intake as well. If you can do your best to eat a variety of foods every day that contain magnesium, you’re more likely to take in an adequate amount to keep your body going.

***So what should you do?***

If you’ve read my blog posts in the past, you already know that I’m not one to recommend taking lots of dietary supplements. (Exception to that rule – [calcium and vitamin D!](https://bettermymeds.com/2022/02/17/the-importance-of-calcium-and-vitamin-d-for-bone-strength/)) But it’s important for you to know that magnesium deficiency is more common than it used to be, and it can have negative effects on your health. Here’s what I recommend:

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about using a magnesium supplement if you

* have symptoms listed above that might be related to magnesium deficiency (unexplained muscle cramps, for example) OR
* are at risk of magnesium deficiency (taking a diuretic or have diabetes, for example)

***Cautions and side effects***

You can choose to try a magnesium supplement on your own, but here are some things to be aware of before you do.

*If you have****kidney problems****of any severity, don’t attempt to use magnesium supplements without talking to your doctor first*. Once absorbed into the bloodstream, magnesium is only eliminated through the kidneys. So don’t take the chance that you might overdo – get guidance from your doctor first.

The most common side effect with magnesium is intestinal discomfort and diarrhea. That happens because magnesium taken orally is only partially absorbed into the bloodstream. The rest continues on through the digestive tract, typically drawing water in as it goes. That doesn’t result in problems for everyone, but some find the discomfort intolerable.

Some research points to the possibility that certain [forms of magnesium](https://www.healthifyme.com/blog/types-of-magnesium/#:~:text=There%20are%20at%20least%2011%20magnesium%20types%2C%20including%20magnesium%20citrate,%2C%20and%20magnesium%20L%2DThreonate.) may be better tolerated than others. The most common form you’ll see among dietary supplements is magnesium oxide. It’s relatively inexpensive but may be more likely to cause intestinal discomfort. An alternative is magnesium glycinate, which may be a bit more expensive, but also may be one of the best tolerated forms. In between are several other options, including magnesium chloride, magnesium lactate, and others.

***Better My Meds wants you to stay healthy!***

If you have any questions about magnesium (or anything else, honestly) please comment in the space below. Or[contact us](https://bettermymeds.com/contact-us-2) directly at ***Better My Meds***. We love hearing from you!



Betty Chaffee, PharmD, is owner and sole proprietor of BetterMyMeds, a Medication Management service devoted to helping people get the maximum benefit from their medications.