



## Stronger For Longer? Creatine Supplements in Older Adults

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Have you seen articles or ads about the wonders of creatine supplementation for older adults? Wondering if you should try it? A reader asked me about creatine recently, so I looked into the research. What I learned was quite interesting.

Creatine is a compound that our bodies need to build muscle. We get some of it from animal protein in our diet and some from our body's manufacturing processes. Though it comes from protein (the building block of muscle), its function is different. Instead of building muscle, it supplies **energy** to muscles. [Competitive athletes](#) often use creatine supplements because it helps their muscles adapt to and recover from intense workouts more quickly. But what can it possibly do for older adults?

It turns out that muscle strength can go a long way to keeping us independent as we age. Muscle strength helps us move, lift, and keep our balance. More than that, it helps our brains work better.

### ***The Muscle-Brain Connection***

Research has shown that older adults who stay physically active are at [lower risk of developing dementia](#), but why? Well, it turns out that there's a [connection between muscles and the brain](#). Muscles send chemical messages to the brain, and the brain sends chemical messages back to muscles. The two organs work together to keep the body strong, even as we age.



### ***How Does The Muscle-Brain Connection Affect Older Adults?***

In early adulthood, muscles and brains are at their strongest. The signals they send to each other are strong, too, keeping us physically and mentally healthy. But aging bodies gradually get less efficient at building muscle. At the same time the body gets less efficient at making creatine, the energy source for muscles. So as we age, not only do we lose muscle mass, we lose the energy needed to make them work.

This is where the muscle-brain connection comes in. Chemical signals they send one another may be weaker, so they don't support each other as well as they used to. Keeping muscles strong can go a long way to improving both physical and mental health. And those two things are essential for us to maintain independence as we get older.

It makes sense that providing more energy to muscles would help them grow and get stronger. And as they get stronger, the brain will stay healthier, too. Many experts and researchers believe that creatine supplements can serve as that energy source.

### ***But What Does the Research Show?***

Much [research](#) supports the efficacy and safety of creatine in competitive athletes who want to improve their performance and increase muscle mass. But most older adults aren't trying to be competitive. Instead, most of us want to maintain (or modestly improve) our strength so we can stay healthy and active. Researchers have been looking more closely at this in recent years.



Like research on most dietary supplements, many studies are small or poorly controlled. But researchers have taken close looks at many of them found areas where results are similar. One [review of several studies](#) concluded that creatine supplementation improves muscle strength in older adults **when used in combination with resistance training**. Those who used creatinine supplements for several weeks found they could lift more weight than those who didn't. In another study, "[sit to stand](#)" [time](#) was shown to improve, meaning that lower body muscles became stronger and balance improved. Research does seem to show that it's the [combination](#) of creatine supplements and weight/resistance training that does the trick. Creatine supplements or weight/resistance training alone were much less effective.

Creatine supplementation has been studied for its effects on brain function, too. The brain is a muscle, and so requires plenty of energy to do its job. Creatine supplies that energy, and so it makes sense that creatine supplementation would improve cognition and memory. But while some research suggests creatine may be helpful, the evidence is [far from conclusive](#).

### ***What Could All This Mean For Daily Living?***

Creatine supplements have the potential to bring positive, noticeable changes to daily life. Stronger muscles may allow us to do more with less fatigue. Maybe carry

two bags of groceries from the car instead of just one. Or regain balance more easily and avoid a fall. Even get out of the easy chair with less effort. Some research indicates that mood might improve (whether due to increased activity and engagement or just better brain function isn't clear). The research isn't compelling enough to guarantee that everyone will benefit from creatine supplements. But it's compelling enough for me to say that it may be worth considering for many of us.



### ***Safety and Dose***

Creatine shouldn't be used by those who have kidney or liver disease. But other than that it's pretty safe, with no known drug interactions. It may cause intestinal discomfort in some folks, a bit of water-weight gain in some. **This is important** -- it can alter the results of a common lab test that checks kidney function so be sure to let your doctor know if you decide to use it.

At the same time, creatine IS a dietary supplement, and is not tightly regulated like medicine. Please read my previous post on the [regulation of dietary supplements](#), and protect yourself.

The most commonly studied dose is 3-5 grams daily. It's pretty easy to take - it comes in a powder that can be dissolved in a drink and has little flavor. It can be taken at any convenient time of day.

### ***Stay Stronger, Longer!***

Whether you decide to try creatine supplementation, or just use aerobic, core, and resistance training alone, make physical activity a daily priority! If you decide to give creatine a try, watch for noticeable changes in strength, balance, and fatigue. And let us know how it goes!

Please add your comments to the space below, or [contact us](#) 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.