

Your favorite health food store has plenty of supplements. But trying to figure out which nutrient is the best—decoding them—can be tricky. Here is a codebook for three of the most widely used and most important natural ingredients.

BOTANICAL:

Rhodiola

WHAT IT IS: The roots of rhodiola (*Rhodiola rosea*) have historically figured prominently in the traditional medicinal systems in Siberia and Mongolia for their tonic and health-promoting effects.

MAIN USE: Rhodiola is an adaptogen. Traditional use and clinical studies have shown that compounds in rhodiola, including salidroside and rosavin, have an ability to make us more resilient physically and emotionally. It doesn't work specifically as a stress reducer, but more like an inoculation to make stress less of an obstacle.

TYPICAL DOSAGE:

250 TO 500 MG DAILY

WHERE IT COMES FROM:

Rhodiola is native to northern Europe and Asia.



WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Read labels carefully. If a rhodiola supplement is clinically studied, that means it has some actual effects and can help you get through long days at the office or intensive workouts more easily. It should be standardized for at least 3 percent rosavins and at least 1 percent (or more) of salidroside.

VITAMIN:

Vitamin B6

WHAT IT IS:

Vitamin B6 is available in a variety of forms from food, including pyridoxine, pyridoxal 5'-phosphate, and pyridoxamine.

WHERE IT COMES FROM:

Vitamin B6 is present in bananas, spinach, tuna, turkey, and beef, just to name a few sources.

MAIN USE:

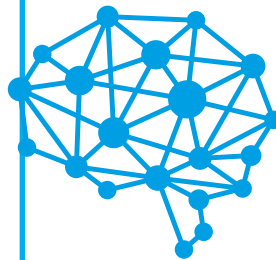
Vitamin B6 is essential to keep nerve endings and brain chemistry healthy, regulate blood pressure, metabolize food and blood sugar, manage premenstrual symptoms, create oxygen-rich blood cells for energy, help amino acids form muscle-building proteins, strengthen and soothe tendons and ligaments, and quell pain from carpal tunnel syndrome.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

The pyridoxal 5'-phosphate form, also known as P5P or PLP, is the best for supplementation because it doesn't have to be converted into an active form by the liver—it already is the active form. You'll see this type of vitamin B6 often labelled as "bioactive" for that reason. Individuals with Crohn's disease, celiac disease, and ulcerative colitis have been found to have low concentrations of the active vitamin B6.

TYPICAL DOSAGE:

12.5 TO 25 MG DAILY



MINERAL:

Chromium

WHAT IT IS:

Chromium (Cr) is an essential trace mineral that needs to be supplied by either diet or supplementation. First discovered in 1797 by Louis-Nicolas Vauquelin, it is the same mineral that is also plated over steel to make chrome. As a supplement, it won't make you shiny, but it will help you stay healthy.

MAIN USE:

This mineral is essential for daily energy, metabolism, and normalizing blood sugar levels. A deficiency of chromium may make you prone to type 2 diabetes, weight gain, a cholesterol imbalance, and an overall tendency toward metabolic syndrome, which includes all three of these conditions, plus elevated triglycerides and high blood pressure. Clinical research shows that chromium supplementation can address these issues though, with the results being lower weight, higher HDL (good) cholesterol levels, lower fasting and post-prandial blood sugar, and less inflammation overall.

WHERE IT COMES FROM:

Food sources of chromium include egg yolks, nuts, whole grains, broccoli, and green beans. Foods with simple sugars may actually deplete the body of chromium, setting the stage for type 2 diabetes and other health risks.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

Chromium nicotinate glycinate. Although some clinical studies have used, and many multivitamins include, chromium picolinate or chloride forms, they are not as efficiently absorbed and they don't remain in the bloodstream as long as chromium chelated to niacin and glycine.

TYPICAL DOSAGE:

50 TO 400 MCg DAILY

Possibly more if you have absorption, blood sugar, or metabolic concerns.