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Heart Supplements

What magnesium, potassium, CoQ10, fish oil and vitamin D do for your heart, and which ones clash with heart medicines.

~½
of American adults fall below the recommended daily magnesium intake

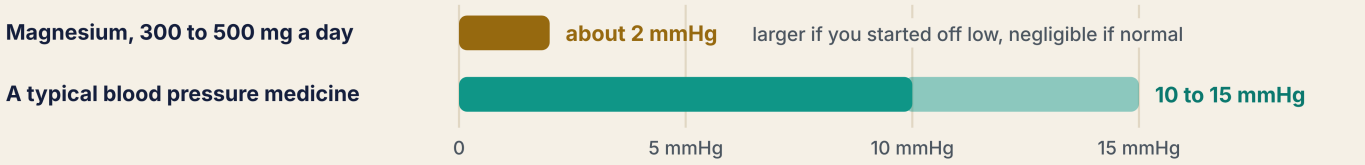
99 mg
the most an over-the-counter potassium pill can contain

~14%
fewer strokes with a potassium salt substitute in about 21,000 adults

MAGNESIUM

It helps most when you're running low

How far the top blood pressure number falls

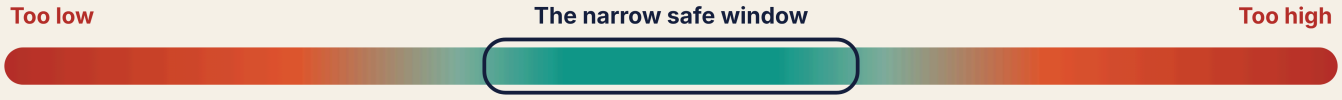


Replacing a real shortfall can settle palpitations, ease leg cramps and improve sleep. Heartburn pills taken long term (PPIs such as omeprazole) and water pills such as furosemide or hydrochlorothiazide can drain magnesium, so ask about a level if you take one. Magnesium is not a substitute for a proper rhythm workup if your heart races or pounds.

POTASSIUM

Food first, pills only when prescribed

Over-the-counter potassium pills are capped at 99 mg for this reason



These push potassium toward too high

kidney disease, ACE inhibitors, ARBs, spironolactone, eplerenone and potassium-sparing diuretics. A potassium salt substitute adds more.

Almost everyone gets too little potassium from food. A baked potato with the skin has about twice the potassium of a banana, and sweet potatoes, white beans, lentils, salmon, avocado, spinach, Swiss chard and yogurt are all rich sources. On a loop or thiazide water pill, you may need prescribed potassium and blood tests.

Food beats the pill

In nearly every category, the food version wins, whether that's greens, beans and whole grains for magnesium, potatoes and salmon for potassium, or fish twice a week in place of a capsule.

BOTTLE BY BOTTLE

What's reasonable, and when to ask first

REASONABLE

Magnesium glycinate	200 to 400 mg of elemental magnesium at bedtime, without serious kidney disease. A label reading 1,000 mg is the weight of the whole compound, so look for elemental magnesium on the back. Magnesium oxide acts mostly as a laxative.
Salt substitute	Reasonable and probably helpful with normal kidney function and none of the medicines listed below.
CoQ10 in heart failure	With reduced pumping function, 100 mg three times a day in addition to the heart failure medicines known to save lives.

CHECK WITH YOUR DOCTOR FIRST

Magnesium and kidneys	With an estimated GFR below 45 or so, or on dialysis, magnesium can build up and cause rhythm problems. Avoid the high doses sold at health food stores.
Salt substitute with any of these	Chronic kidney disease, an ACE inhibitor (lisinopril, enalapril), an ARB (losartan, valsartan), spironolactone, eplerenone or a potassium-sparing diuretic, each of which raises potassium on its own.
Fish oil with AFib	New AFib was modestly more common on high-dose omega-3. A standard 1 gram dose is usually fine. With frequent AFib episodes, Dr. Rasch suggests skipping fish oil and getting omega-3s from food.

UNLIKELY TO DO MUCH

CoQ10 for statin aches	Safe, and some patients say it helps, but trials don't support routine use. Better first steps are usually a lower dose, a different statin, or taking it every other day.
Standard fish oil	1 gram a day didn't significantly cut heart events in the largest trial. Prescription icosapent ethyl, 4 grams a day, is a different product.
Vitamin D	2,000 IU a day didn't cut heart attacks, strokes or heart deaths, so it isn't a heart supplement.

DANGEROUS COMBINATIONS

Red yeast rice and a statin	Red yeast rice contains a natural form of lovastatin. On top of a prescription statin it doubles the dose, and that can cause muscle and liver problems.
Grapefruit and some heart pills	It can raise some statin and blood pressure pill levels. Minor with amlodipine.
Garlic pills and warfarin	High-dose capsules add bleeding risk. Tell your clinic before starting or stopping one.
Fish oil and blood thinners	High doses can raise bleeding risk, though standard doses of about 1 gram a day are usually fine.
St. John's wort and heart drugs	It can lower the level of several heart drugs and blood thinners and make them less effective.

BRING THE BAG

Supplements count. They interact with medicines and affect bleeding, blood pressure, kidney function and rhythm, and the FDA doesn't check what's in the bottle, so look for USP or NSF certification. Bring the bottles or a written list to your next visit.

READ THE FULL ARTICLE

damianrasch.com/
heart-supplements-magnesium-potassium-coq10

For education only, and not a substitute for advice from your own physician. Sources include Zhang (Hypertension 2016), Aburto (BMJ 2013), the salt substitution trial (NEJM 2021), Q-SYMBIO (2014), Qu (JAHA 2018), Manson et al. (NEJM 2019), REDUCE-IT (NEJM 2019) and STRENGTH (JAMA 2020).

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