



Should You Sip Your Supplements?

You can now put medicinal plants and compounds in your morning beverage. What you need to know about a growing trend. **BY LESLIE GOLDMAN**

A SWIG OF JUICE, smoothie, or coffee used to be the way people washed down their morning multivitamin supplements, but increasingly, these drinks *are* the supplements. Cafés and smoothie bars offer menus of special wellness mix-ins and add-ons that promise to do much more than hydrate you. But there's a hitch: Those ingredients aren't reviewed by the FDA before being marketed, so generally no third party has verified claims of safety or authenticity, says Mark Moyad, MD, the Jenkins director of complementary and alternative medicine at the University of Michigan Medical Center and coauthor of *The Supplement Handbook*. Here's what to know about three popular types of concoctions—and ideas for what to stir into your drink instead.

THINK TWICE ACTIVATED CHARCOAL

Inky-black smoothies, chai teas, and lattes owe their goth hue to activated charcoal (AC), made by burning coconut shells, coal, or wood and then heating it in the presence of a gas, such as CO₂ or steam, to create microscopic nooks and crannies that bind to chemicals it comes into contact with. In hospitals, AC is used to treat drug overdoses and poisoning cases; in a drink, it supposedly “detoxifies” and draws impurities out of the body, but there's no scientific evidence to support this. Worse: “If you consume AC within several hours of taking medication, you're playing with fire,” says Tamara Duker Freuman, a registered dietitian in New York

City and author of *The Bloating Belly Whisperer*.

“Charcoal will bind to some oral medicines—like thyroid meds, statins, and birth control pills—before they have a chance to do their job.” AC may suck up vitamin C, too, so adding it to your Green Latifah can be counterproductive.

COLLAGEN

Consuming collagen, a type of protein that's a building block of skin, is purported to improve skin's texture and luminosity. “The thing is, collagen powders and supplements are broken down in the digestive system and absorbed throughout the body,” says Eva Hurst, MD, director of the center for dermatologic and cosmetic surgery at Washington University in St. Louis. “Our G.I. tract isn't smart enough to send it directly to the skin.” Hurst says one study did find that women taking daily collagen supplements for eight weeks had slightly smoother skin around the eyes, but “it was a small study of just 114 women,” and more research is necessary. (Vegetarians, take note: Collagen supplements are made from ground-up cow, chicken, pig, and fish parts.)

ADAPTOGENS

For centuries, these medicinal plants, herbs, and fungi have been used to help people relax and decrease stress reactions, likely in part by affecting cell communication in a way that dampens the fight-or-flight response. Now you can pay to add adaptogens like maca, ashwagandha, and cordyceps to your smoothie. But “they're poorly understood and work in complex ways,” says Alka Gupta, MD, cofounder and codirector of

the Integrative Health and Wellbeing Program at New York-Presbyterian Hospital. At low doses in a latte or a smoothie, “they're generally nontoxic,” Gupta says, but you won't likely feel effects immediately, if at all. “When I prescribe adaptogens, I treat them as seriously as medication,” says Gupta. “I'd be cautious of getting them from places other than a naturopathic physician or a medical practitioner who has experience with them.” At least then you'll know what side effects (if any) could occur and why a certain adaptogen might make sense for you.

TRY IT! CAULIFLOWER

First it replaced mashed potatoes and rice, then it stood in for pizza crust. Now cauliflower is sidling into smoothies, where it's used as a low-carb thickener. Freuman supports this move because cauliflower has a mild flavor that mixes well with fruit, “plus it has fiber and antioxidants.” Bonus: Some studies suggest that regular consumption of cruciferous vegetables may lower the risk of certain cancers. In recipes that call for a frozen banana, swap a heaping half cup of frozen florets or one-third cup of frozen riced cauliflower.

OLIVE OIL

Drizzling a tablespoon of EVOO into your smoothie is a heart-smart hack; olive oil can help lower LDL cholesterol (the bad kind), decreasing heart disease risk. It also facilitates the absorption of fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K, meaning you'll get more nutrients from dark leafy greens, citrus, kefir, or yogurt. EVOO shouldn't impact a smoothie's taste, Freuman says, but mixes best with ingredients like mango, berries, pineapple, chocolate, and cinnamon. Bottoms up!