A Look at Brain Health and Dietary Supplements

2021 AARP Omni Survey of Supplement Use Among Adults Age 50 and Older

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

A survey of adults age 50 and older was fielded in June 2021 to understand the use of dietary supplements for brain health-related reasons. The survey focused on those who take supplements for their brain health by inquiring about the reasons for doing so and which of three supplements they report taking. The results of the survey are presented in this fact sheet.

KEY FINDINGS

Taking vitamins or dietary supplements is common among adults 50 and older. Adults ages 65 and older are significantly more likely than those ages 50 to 64 to report currently taking vitamins or dietary supplements (83% vs. 74%). Women are also more likely than men to take them (85% vs. 71%).

Are you currently taking vitamins or dietary supplements (% yes, n=1,039)

Additionally, greater percentages of African American adults and adults who identify as another non-Hispanic race/ethnicity or are two or more races/ethnicities take supplements compared to white adults (89% for each vs. 76%). Notably, adults 50+ with incomes between \$30,000 and less than \$60,000 are more likely than those with incomes between \$60,000 and less than \$100,000 to take them (84% vs. 73%, not shown).

78% of adults age 50 and older currently take vitamins or dietary supplements

Are you currently taking vitamins or dietary supplements (% yes, n=1,039)

One-fifth (21%) take vitamins or dietary supplements for their brain health. The top reasons for doing so are to maintain or improve memory (71%) and to maintain or improve mental sharpness (60%). More than one in 10 (12%) said they take a supplement to delay dementia.

Reasons for taking a dietary supplement for your brain health (weighted n=218, unweighted n=229)

Nearly six in ten brain health supplement users take Omega-3; four percent take Prevagen. Among respondents who reported taking a vitamin or dietary supplement for brain health, nearly six in ten reported taking an Omega-3 supplement and more than four in ten said they took a fish oil supplement. Notably, only four percent of those who take a supplement for brain health said they take Prevagen. Younger adults ages 50-64 are significantly more likely than those ages 65 or older to take omega-3 (68% vs. 39%).

Brain health supplement users commonly take Omega-3; less commonly take a fish oil supplement; rarely take Prevagen

IMPLICATIONS

About one in five (21%) adults aged 50 and older say they take a dietary supplement for brain health and among those, four percent take Prevagen. The Global Council on Brain Health (GCBH)¹ concluded that Prevagen and other supplements used for brain health lack evidence of effectiveness. Therefore, many adults are spending money on products that have not been proven to help them.

¹ Global Council on Brain Health (2019). "The Real Deal on Brain Health Supplements: GCBH Recommendations on Vitamins, Minerals, and Other Dietary Supplements." Available at www.GlobalCouncilOnBrainHealth.org DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26419/pia.00094.001>

SURVEY RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

n = 1,039 adults age 50 and older

Demographic Variable	Weighted	Unweighted
Age		
50 – 64	53% (n=549)	50% (n=524)
65 or older	47% (n=490)	50% (n=515)
Gender		
Men	47% (n=486)	46% (n=476)
Women	53% (n=553)	54% (n=563)
Race/Ethnicity		
Non-Hispanic Caucasian	71% (n=734)	74% (n=773)
Non-Hispanic African American	11% (n=111)	9% (n=89)
Hispanic	12% (n=121)	9% (n=89)
Other, Non-Hispanic and 2 or more races	7% (n=73)	8% (n=88)
Education		
Less than high school	10% (n=101)	2% (n=20)
High school graduate or equivalent	31% (n=319)	19% (n=192)
Vocational, tech school, or some college	25% (n=262)	45% (n=468)
Bachelor's degree	19% (n=193)	19% (n=195)
Graduate degree	16% (n=164)	16% (n=164)
Marital Status		
Currently Married	61% (n=629)	59% (n=616)
Currently separated/divorced/widowed/single	39% (n=410)	41% (n=423)
Household Income		
Less than \$30,000	23% (n=236)	19% (n=194)
\$30,000 – under \$60,000	28% (n=286)	28% (n=295)
\$60,000 – under \$100,00	25% (n=259)	27% (n=282)
\$100,000 or more	25% (n=259)	26% (n=268)

METHODOLOGY

The *A Look at Brain Health and Dietary Supplements* survey was conducted online from June 17-21, 2021, with a total sample of 1,039 adults ages 50-plus. This national survey was conducted using NORC at the University of Chicago's AmeriSpeak 50+ Omnibus probability-based sample. AmeriSpeak is designed to be representative of the U.S. household population. All data are weighted by age, gender, and race according to the most recent Census population statistics. The margin of error for the national survey is ± 4.27 percentage points. (Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding).

For more information on the methodology or the survey, contact Laura Mehegan at Imehegan@aarpp.org or Chuck Rainville at grainville@aarpp.org.