

# Chromium

Learn what this vital nutrient can do for your blood sugar, your heart, and even those nagging carbohydrate cravings.

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**THERE ARE MANY FORMS** of chromium supplements; one of the most common is chromium picolinate.

Just last year, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) allowed a qualified health claim for chromium picolinate. The FDA's ruling was based on findings that chromium picolinate helps increase insulin sensitivity in those at high risk for diabetes.

## Diabetes

Reducing intake of white flour and sugar is a good place to start diabetes prevention, but emerging evidence suggests you should also make sure you are ingesting enough chromium. A National Institutes of Health study indicates that chromium picolinate supplements significantly enhance insulin sensitivity, increasing both the number of insulin receptors on cells and the activity of those receptors.

## Depression

Supplements may also be useful in treating some cases of depression when carbohydrate craving is a prominent symptom. A study of 113 people with a disorder known as atypical depression found that chromium picolinate appeared to aid appetite-related symptoms. Moreover, those who said they had "irrepressible cravings" for sweets and starches also showed a general improvement in depression symptoms.

## Heart attack

Dr. Eliseo Guallar and his colleagues from the Welch Center for Prevention, Epidemiology, and Clinical Research in Baltimore, measured chromium levels in 684 men who survived a heart attack and in a similar number of men who'd never

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experienced one. Heart-attack patients' chromium levels were 13 percent lower than the other subjects' levels. Subjects with the highest levels of chromium were 35 percent less likely to have a heart attack than those with the lowest levels.

The results also revealed that older individuals had lower chromium levels, (the findings indicate an approximate 9 percent decline with each decade of increasing age), as did those with high blood pressure.

## Food sources

Consuming more chromium-boosting whole grains, broccoli, apples, and other produce while cutting down on chromium-depleting sugar will help. As a fallback, consider a chromium picolinate supplement.

## Recommended daily intake

The current recommendation for chromium is 25 to 35 micrograms a day, but trials have used 100 to 200 mcg or more. You can find chromium in multivitamins or as stand-alone supplements. At this time, I don't think taking more than 100 to 200 mcg a day is necessary. Too-high doses have the potential to be counterproductive or harmful; however, those with diabetes could take more if their doctor approves.

## Side effects

High doses may cause nausea or other gastrointestinal disturbances. Long-term high doses may have side effects that we currently do not fully understand. That is why I prefer people take less than 200 mcg a day with occasional breaks. ✎

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