

Ask Leyla: Is magnesium stearate safe?



Q: I've noticed magnesium stearate as an ingredient in some of my supplements. What is it? Is it harmful? Should I be worried about how much magnesium I'm getting between that and my regular magnesium supplement?

A: In a word, no. Let me explain.



Magnesium stearate is a flow agent used in many nutritional supplements as well as pharmaceuticals. Flow agents ensure a consistent dose of a micronutrient or product in each capsule in addition to preventing ingredients from sticking to each other and the equipment used in encapsulating the products. It's actually a "good manufacturing practice" to use flow agents. Not doing so could result in inconsistent doses of a vitamin, mineral or other product.

Magnesium is a mineral (a very important one!) and stearic acid is a saturated fat found in common foods such as beef, eggs, coconut oil, chocolate, walnuts and human breast milk.

Despite the fact that it's a saturated fat, stearic acid has been shown to have a neutral effect on cholesterol.

A common concern I've heard from many people is whether we're overdosing on magnesium due to the ubiquitous use of magnesium stearate in manufacturing. As described in this article at *Nutrition Review*, magnesium stearate is composed of one molecule of magnesium and two molecules of stearic acid held together by ionic bonds, making it a salt. This is broken down in an acid environment (like your stomach). The percentage of magnesium is actually only 4% with stearic acid comprising 96%. As you can see, there is no real cause for concern about overdoing magnesium, even if you're taking a lot of supplements.

And regarding any claims made by some practitioners that magnesium stearate is a chalk-like substance that can prevent absorption of nutrients by gumming up intestines or forming biofilms, this has been thoroughly debunked. So has the claim that it suppresses immune T-cell function. Take a look at this *very excellent* video by Dr. Dana Myatt, Naturopathic Medical Doctor, as she takes apart those claims one by one.

To your health!