

# Nutritional Supplements and Food Additives in Lebanon



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How many times have you heard about a nutritional supplement that claims to boost your energy, make up for what is missing in your diet, or improve your athletic performance? Probably more times than you can count, right?

In today's fast-paced world, it is no surprise that many people turn to supplements as a quick fix to support their health and well-being. But what exactly are these supplements? and more importantly, do we really need them?

In this article, we will dive into the world of nutritional supplements and explore their regulatory framework in Lebanon.

## What are Nutritional Supplements (NS)?

A nutritional supplement is a product designed to provide nutrients that are either missing or insufficient in a person's regular diet <sup>(1)</sup>. These products can include one or more of the following components: vitamins, minerals, fiber, fatty acids, amino acids, or herbal extracts. You will usually find them in the form of pills, capsules, tablets, powders, or liquids, but they are not meant to replace regular food <sup>(1)</sup>.

## Are they Really Needed?

In general, healthy people who eat a balanced and varied diet are getting all necessary nutrients their bodies need,

thus they do not need to take supplements <sup>(2)</sup>. On the other hand, in cases of nutrient deficiencies or specific health conditions, certain supplements can be important — such as folic acid during pregnancy, which helps reduce the risk of birth defects <sup>(3)</sup>. The World Health Organization emphasizes that a balanced diet is the primary source of nutrition, and supplements should not be substitutes.

## What are Their Uses?

NS can be very helpful when used appropriately. For example, iron is essential for treating some types of anemia. Vitamin D is important for people who cannot absorb it naturally, or they have osteoporosis or kidney problems. <sup>(4)</sup> Taking supplements requires attention. Some supplements contain ingredients that can interact with your medications and lead to serious toxicity. On top of that, certain plant-based supplements have been linked to liver damage, heart problems, and other side effects. <sup>(5)</sup>

## Widespread Use in Lebanon

The rise in health awareness has led to a global increase in the consumption of NS. This was fueled even more by the rapid spread of medical knowledge through social platforms and the overall improvement in living standards. <sup>(6)</sup>

In Lebanon, the trend is comparable. Influenced by social media and targeted marketing campaigns, younger people are the main consumers of NS. <sup>(7)</sup> Also, the availability of these supplements in shelves, pharmacies and even online without the need of medical consultation makes their consumption a piece of cake.

Local market insights reveal that over 70% of young urban adults in Lebanon regularly use supplements, particularly protein powders, energy boosters, and beauty-related vitamins. <sup>(8)</sup>

In Lebanon, the revenue generated in the Vitamins & Minerals market is estimated to be US\$24.55m in the year 2025 <sup>(7)</sup>. Lebanon heavily relies on imported nutritional supplements, while official statistic varies by year.

The global NS market size is projected to reach USD 327.42 billion by 2030. <sup>(9)</sup> It is characterized by a continuous growth in sales, confirming the belief that they are an important part of people's diets worldwide. <sup>(10)</sup>

## What are food additives?

Food additives are substances added to food to preserve flavor, enhance taste, or improve appearance—but what is really behind that appealing red color or that perfect orange taste?

Common examples include preservatives (like sodium benzoate), artificial sweeteners (like aspartame), and food colorings. <sup>(11)</sup> These additives are widely used in packaged foods like juices, processed meats, and snacks found on shelves in Lebanese supermarkets.

And while some additives are approved for use in small quantities, prolonged exposure is a different story. Over time, certain additives have been linked to allergic reactions, intolerances, obesity, cardiovascular diseases and even cancer. <sup>(12) (13)</sup>

## Legal regulations in Lebanon:

Lebanon follows a *hybrid system*, meaning it includes standards from both the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) and international bodies like the Codex Alimentarius. <sup>(14)</sup>

The MOPH requires that nutritional supplements be registered and tested before reaching the market. However, enforcement is inconsistent, especially for online or under-the-counter products. <sup>(15)</sup> Luckily, Lebanon bans the use of certain high- risk food additives, but without strong monitoring systems, violations remain common.

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