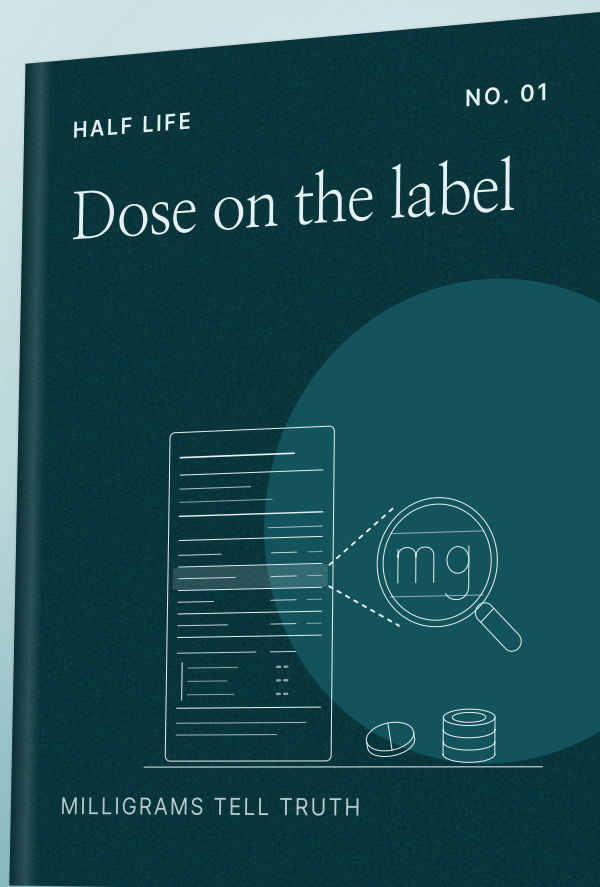




MONOGRAPH · DOSING

Supplement labels, decoded milligram by milligram

By the end you will price any two bottles per milligram and spot where a label leans on a trial. This dosing walkthrough turns Supplement Facts into numbers you can check.

- **Serving rules**
One serving fixes every milligram listed beneath it.
- **Form counts**
Milligrams name the nutrient, not the whole powder.
- **Cost math**
Cost per gram beats price per jar.

By Victoria Hawkins · Updated Aug 21, 2026 · 10 min read

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By the close you will be able to audit any Supplement Facts panel in about ten minutes, line the label dose against a trial dose, and price the result per milligram. Front panels can match while back panels diverge, with one naming forms and weights and another folding botanicals into a blend. The back panel rewards a steady read and shrinks the front panel noise.

01

Serving size first, because it scales the dose

Every figure underneath moves with the line at the top. FDA says serving size shows what people usually eat or drink and it is not advice on how much to eat or drink. Calories, nutrient quantities and percent Daily Values all attach to that stated amount, so a routine of two servings doubles calories, nutrients and percent Daily Values.

A food illustration clarifies the multiplication. On the FDA lasagna example, 1 cup is one serving with 280 calories so four servings in the package give 1,120 calories. Supplement arithmetic follows the same logic with a different unit. Under 21 CFR 101.36, supplement serving size must use a word that fits the form, like tablets, capsules, packets or teaspoonfuls.

Two adjacent lines deserve joint attention at the top. Supplement Facts must show dietary ingredient names and amounts, serving size and servings per container, unless amount and serving data overlap. Under that same rule, Servings Per Container may be left out when it already appears in the net quantity of contents statement. A bottle marked 60 capsules with a serving of 2 capsules conveys the total even where the servings line is absent.

How to work it in under a minute

Start with the form term, then its count. Record whether the serving equals 1 capsule, 2 tablets, 1 packet or 1 teaspoonful. Locate servings per container or calculate it from net contents. Scale each listed amount when daily use exceeds one serving. Carry that scaled amount through the remainder of the review, since dose, blend weight and price per serving all derive from it.

This arrangement predates much of the current market. DSHEA in 1994 defined dietary supplements, set added label requirements and allowed optional label statements. FDA put DSHEA label rules into effect on September 23, 1997 for identity, nutrition labeling, ingredient

listing and claims. The panel has stayed steady since then, which makes comparison across brands and years easier.

02

Dietary ingredients, weights, forms and units

The central block names what the manufacturer counts as dietary ingredients. By statute dietary ingredients span vitamins, minerals, amino acids, herbs and other botanicals, plus other dietary substances and their concentrates, metabolites, constituents, extracts or combos. Each entry should present a name, a weight and a unit in Amount Per Serving.

Form carries similar weight to amount. A Supplement Facts panel may name an ingredient source form like as folic acid plus the plant part, which a Nutrition Facts panel may not. Parenthetical text often holds that specification. Calcium as calcium carbonate, magnesium as magnesium oxide, or vitamin C as ascorbic acid each identify a distinct source behind the nutrient term. Under 21 CFR 101.36 the label may swap in ascorbic acid for Vitamin C, vitamin B1 for thiamin, vitamin B2 for riboflavin, and energy for calories. Two bottles with separate forms no longer permit weight alone to settle the match.

Weight labels still ask for one more quiet conversion in your head. Under 21 CFR 101.36, the label has to show the weight of calcium itself rather than the weight of calcium carbonate. The figure denotes the nutrient proper. That rule keeps labels uniform, but it means the powder in the capsule weighs more than the declared figure whenever the source brings added salts, waters of hydration or carriers.

Units warrant deliberate care. Milligrams, micrograms, grams and International Units resist visual conversion. Later cost comparisons require aligned units such as mg against mg. Transcribe the unit verbatim during note taking, especially for vitamin A, vitamin D and vitamin E where older and newer labels may differ in convention.

FROM THE EDITORS

Under 21 CFR 101.36, vitamins and minerals present at less than 2 percent of the Reference Daily Intake are amounts that can be declared as zero and shall not be declared, so Supplement Facts panels cannot list zero amounts, while Nutrition Facts panels must list zero amounts of nutrients. A missing line signals little or none for labeling purposes, not proof of absence from the formula.

03

Percent Daily Value as a rough comparator

The right column offers Percent Daily Value and tempts fast conclusions. View it as a labeling benchmark, not individualized guidance. Elevated and reduced figures assist in ordering bottles relative to one another. They cannot prescribe intake for a given individual without health professional advice.

Two features constrain that column. First, Supplement Facts leaves out zero amounts and very small amounts, as described above. A nutrient below 2 percent of the Reference Daily Intake remains off the panel. Second, percent values change with serving size. Since every amount follows the stated serving, doubling the serving also doubles the percent Daily Values. A panel that seems low at 1 capsule can seem high at a 2 capsule serving.

Use the percent daily value column to rank products, not to judge potency. Where two bottles show an identical ingredient in an identical form and unit, the larger percent figure indicates greater nutrient quantity per serving. Where forms diverge, suspend ranking, because form shapes ingredient comparisons in ways the panel alone does not resolve. Where a figure appears large enough to influence total intake from food and other products, maker records, lot testing and professional advice carry more weight than the panel.

The label retains boundaries that count. It cannot approve products, and no warning or a facility statement does not equal no risk. Whether a higher percent Daily Value suits one person remains beyond what the label can answer.

04

Other Ingredients read for manufacturing role

Under the dietary entries lies a separate roster, frequently set smaller. Other Ingredients are inactive parts like fillers, binders, disintegrants, lubricants and glidants, coatings, and flavors and texture modifiers. FDA wants supplement labels to state it is a dietary supplement, maker packer or distributor name and place of business, ingredient list and net contents. That Other Ingredients roster forms part of the required ingredient disclosure.

Mere length reveals little. Other Ingredients can do real work like flow, binding, disintegration, coating, stability and taste, so a long list alone does not prove low quality. Capsule shells, tablet binders that press powder together, lubricants that keep fast equipment running, coatings that manage moisture, and flavors that make powders drinkable each serve a production need. A short list alone does not prove higher quality either. Some sellers and writers warn excipients may trigger allergies, change dissolution, add bulk or hide detail, so purpose matters more than count.

Scan that line for role instead of alarm. Gelatin or vegetable cellulose usually makes the capsule. Cellulose, starch or dicalcium phosphate often gives bulk or structure. Magnesium stearate or silicon dioxide often improves flow. Tablets often come coated in waxes, shellacs or polymers that affect absorption. Color and flavor additives adjust how a powder looks and tastes while adding little to dose or absorption. When the label states a grade, like a certain starch or coating, write it down. Keep in mind single excipient weights are not required when the label gives no amount, which bounds how far comparison can go.

Front phrases demand supporting records. Phrases like no fillers may show one formula choice but do not reveal the role of the ingredients that remain. The Other Ingredients list, the lot number and third party papers tell more than the claim.

05

Proprietary blends where single doses stay hidden

Blends complicate direct matching. In a proprietary blend, blend weight and each ingredient in the blend must appear, but not the amount of each ingredient in the blend. Proprietary blends can be styled blend, complex, matrix or proprietary formulation, showing only total combined amount with ingredients ranked by descending weight. The precise dose of one ingredient inside such a blend, when only total blend weight appears, is something the evidence does not show.

The pattern occurs widely. As of April 2022 in the NIH Dietary Supplement Label Database, 34 percent of labels put dietary ingredients in blends and 21 percent put them in proprietary blends. A shopper encountering multiple botanicals under a single total therefore meets standard industry conduct, not an oddity.

What to check when doses are grouped

Locate the blend title plus its aggregate weight first. Verify that each component inside the blend receives a name. Verify sequence, because ingredients must appear in descending order by weight. Observe which component heads the list and which closes it, because the leading component predominates even while its precise milligrams remain undisclosed. Give stimulant blends added caution, since grouped amounts block dose comparison, intake estimates and trial dose checks.

Proprietary blends guard formulas but conceal single doses, which limits dose comparison, intake estimates and trial dosing. That compromise merits a place in the purchase reasoning. Where dose governs a head to head test, the bottle with per ingredient weights permits calculations that a blended bottle blocks. Where the company releases lot level certificates or third party details that quantify blend components, those documents narrow the gap.

FROM THE EDITORS

Take that disclaimer as notice of review status rather than proof of effect, since structure function claims portray a nutrient role in normal structure or function, must state FDA has not evaluated the claim and the product is not meant to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent disease, and proof must reach FDA within 30 days of marketing.

06

Cost per dose plus seals, lots and claim checks

Dollar comparisons begin once dose stands clear. Price per unit can be checked from price, servings per container and units per serving, with matched units such as mg against mg. The manual price method asks for only two quick divisions. Compare jar price to servings per container to get price per serving. Then divide that by units per serving to get price per mg or gram. Compare identical units only.

A worked illustration keeps the procedure candid. A 30 dollar jar holding 30 servings prices out at 1 dollar per serving before absorption even enters the math. If one serving lists 500 mg of the target ingredient, the math lands at 2 dollars per gram. A cheaper jar with lower serving weight can cost more per gram, and a larger jar with more capsules per serving can cost more per day. Blends spoil this math at the second step, since single ingredient units are absent and only total blend weight is shown.

Documentation follows. Look for outside seals, lot numbers, maker name and address, plus structure function disclaimers. FDA does not approve dietary supplement sites or makers and it issues no official FDA Approved seal for products. Any seal suggesting formal approval overstates what certification can show. A lot number ties the jar to one production batch and to whatever certificate of analysis the maker will share. The full safety and quality past of one jar cannot be learned from the panel alone without lot testing, maker records or third party certification detail.

Front claims close the loop. Structure function wording must carry the FDA disclaimer described above. Labeling rules require identity, net contents and contact details to appear. When any of those marks are absent, or when the seal cannot be checked with the named certifier, put the jar aside until the maker provides papers. Traceable jars earn the shelf. Opaque jars wait.

07

The checklist

-
- ☐ Transcribe serving size plus its form term
-
- ☐ Check servings per container or net contents against the trial dose before trusting the scoop.
-
- ☐ Scale each amount to servings consumed
-
- ☐ Log every dietary ingredient name with unit
-
- ☐ Log parenthetical form for each nutrient
-
- ☐ Confirm listed weights report nutrient weight rather than salt weight or blend weight.
-
- ☐ Use percent Daily Value for ranking only
-
- ☐ Assess Other Ingredients by role, not count
-
- ☐ Highlight blends, complexes, matrixes and proprietary formulas
-
- ☐ Confirm blend order descends by weight
-
- ☐ Compute price per serving from jar price
-
- ☐ Start with price per mg or gram calculated in matched units
-
- ☐ Locate maker address, lot code and seals
-
- ☐ Require disclaimers and dismiss FDA Approved seals
-

08

Sources and further reading

- How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label · [fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov)
- Dietary Supplement Labeling Guide · [fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov)
- Perspectives on the Use of Proprietary Blends in Dietary Supplements · [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
- How to Read Dietary Supplement Labels · labelsunwrapped.org
- Proprietary blends: What does this mean? · opss.org
- 21 CFR 101.36 – Nutrition labeling of dietary supplements. · [ecfr.gov](https://www.ecfr.gov)

For information only, not medical advice. These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration, and no supplement here is intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. Ask a doctor or pharmacist before starting one, especially alongside prescription medicines, in pregnancy or before surgery.



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Victoria looks after the brands Half Life works with and makes sure every sponsored page is labelled and dose-checked like the rest. She spent six years in regulatory affairs at a supplement maker, so she knows exactly what a label is allowed to say.
