



ROUTINE GUIDE · STACKS

Check any supplement label in two minutes flat

Two bottles can promise the same thing and pour out very different mornings. This guide turns the back panel into a steady two minute habit that fits before coffee.



Anchor first

Pair the label check with breakfast for one week.



Space blends

Keep grouped formulas apart from lookalike singles.



Track servings

Log serving size so night doses stay accurate.

By Ashley Chen · Updated Sep 18, 2026 · 10 min read

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You take two capsules when the label serving is one, or you take one scoop when the serving is two, and the whole routine runs on the wrong math. That slip is normal on busy mornings, and it makes every later choice about timing, stacking and cost a little off. Fix the serving line first, then let timing and pairing follow.

01

Start with serving size and servings

The panel starts with the detail that resets all the numbers under it. The Food and Drug Administration says serving size shows the amount people commonly eat or drink and it is not advice about how much to eat or drink. All calorie counts, nutrient amounts and percent Daily Values on the label point back to that serving, so two servings calls for doubling calories, nutrients and percent Daily Values.

A food sample shows the calculation clearly. In the FDA lasagna sample label, one serving equals 1 cup with 280 calories and four servings in the package would equal 1,120 calories. Supplement math follows the same pattern, with a different unit. Under 21 CFR 101.36, serving size for dietary supplements has to use a word suited to the form, like tablets, capsules, packets or teaspoonfuls.

Search for two lines placed near one another near the top of the panel. Supplement Facts panels have to carry names and quantities of dietary ingredients, serving size and servings per container, with an exception when quantity and servings detail overlap. Under the same rule, Servings Per Container does not have to appear when it is given in the net quantity of contents statement. A jar marked 60 capsules with a serving size of 2 capsules already gives the count, even when the servings line is absent.

Make it stick in under a minute

Read the form word first, then the count. Notice whether a serving means 1 capsule, 2 tablets, 1 packet or 1 teaspoonful. Check servings per container or work it out from net contents. Multiply each amount on the panel when the daily routine calls for more than one serving. Hold that multiplied amount in mind through the rest of the review, because dose, blend weight and price per serving all build on it.

The rule behind this layout predates most jars on the shelf. DSHEA in 1994 defined dietary supplements, added distinct labeling requirements and allowed for optional labeling statements. FDA put DSHEA labeling rules into effect on September 23, 1997 for statement of identity, nutrition labeling, ingredient labeling and claims. The panel has stayed steady since then, which supports comparison across brands and years.

02

Read dietary ingredients, amounts and forms

The middle section of the panel names what the maker treats as dietary ingredients. Dietary ingredients cover vitamins, minerals, amino acids, herbs or other botanicals, other dietary substances, and concentrates, metabolites, constituents, extracts or combinations. Each line in that section should give a name, a weight and a unit under Amount Per Serving.

Form counts alongside weight. Your Supplement Facts panel can name the source form of an ingredient such as folic acid and the plant part, while a Nutrition Facts panel cannot. Parentheses usually hold that detail. Calcium as calcium carbonate, magnesium as magnesium oxide, or vitamin C as ascorbic acid each name a distinct source material behind the nutrient name. Under 21 CFR 101.36, accepted synonyms cover Vitamin C as ascorbic acid, thiamin as vitamin B1, riboflavin as vitamin B2, and calories as energy. When two jars name different forms, the comparison moves beyond weight against weight alone.

Weight calls for one more conversion in thinking. Under 21 CFR 101.36, quantitative amounts by weight have to reflect the weight of the dietary ingredient rather than the weight of the source, such as calcium rather than calcium carbonate. The figure points to the nutrient itself. That rule keeps labels uniform for your routine, yet it also means the powder in the capsule weighs more than the listed amount whenever the source compound includes extra mineral salts, waters of hydration or carriers.

Units merit a pause. Milligrams, micrograms, grams and International Units do not translate at a glance. Later price checks only work with matching units such as mg against mg. Copy the unit exactly when notes are taken, especially for vitamin A, vitamin D and vitamin E where older and newer labels may use different conventions.

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, while Supplement Facts panels cannot list zero amounts and Nutrition Facts panels must list zero amounts of nutrients. If it is missing from the panel, that means little or none for labeling, not proof it is absent from your scoop.

03

Use percent daily value with care

Percent Daily Value sits in the right column and tempts fast judgment. View it as a labeling reference, not as personal advice. High and low values support ranking jars against each other. They do not fix intake for a particular person without health professional advice.

Two quirks control what shows in that column. First, Supplement Facts panels leave out zero amounts and very low amounts, as noted above. A nutrient present at less than 2 percent of the Reference Daily Intake remains off the panel. Second, percent values rise with serving size. Because all amounts point to the stated serving, doubling the serving doubles the percent Daily Values as well. A panel that appears modest at 1 capsule may appear high at a 2 capsule serving.

Use the column to sort, not to decide. When two jars name the same ingredient in the same form and unit, the higher percent value points to more of that nutrient per serving. When forms differ, hold off before ranking, because form shapes how ingredients compare in ways the panel alone does not settle. When a value looks high enough to affect total intake from food and other products, maker records, lot testing and professional advice matter more than the panel.

The panel also has boundaries that matter. It cannot approve products, and lack of a warning or presence of a facility statement does not signal no risk. Whether a higher percent Daily Value suits a particular person remains outside what the label can show.

04

Read the other ingredients line

Below the dietary ingredients rests a separate list, often in smaller type. Other Ingredients are the supporting parts like fillers, binders, coatings, and flavors and texture helpers. FDA calls for dietary supplement labeling to carry a descriptive name stating it is a dietary supplement, maker packer or distributor name and place of business, ingredient list and net contents. The Other Ingredients list forms part of that ingredient disclosure.

Length by itself tells little. Other Ingredients can fill real roles such as flow, binding, disintegration, coating, stability and taste, so a long list does not alone prove low quality. Capsule shells, tablet binders that hold powder under pressure, lubricants that keep high speed equipment running, coatings that manage moisture, and flavors that make powders drinkable each serve a manufacturing need. A short list does not alone prove higher quality either. Some sellers and commentators caution that excipients may trigger allergies, alter dissolution, add bulk or lack full transparency, so purpose matters more than count.

Scan the line for role rather than fear. Gelatin or vegetable cellulose commonly makes the capsule. Cellulose, starch or dicalcium phosphate commonly adds bulk or structure. Magnesium stearate or silicon dioxide commonly supports flow. Waxes, shellacs or polymers commonly coat tablets. Colors and flavors tune appearance and taste. Where the label states a grade, such as a particular starch or coating, write it down. Keep in mind that single excipient weights are not required where the label states no amount, which limits how far comparison can reach.

Front label language needs papers behind it. Phrases like no fillers may outline one formula choice yet they do not explain the role of the ingredients that remain. The Other Ingredients list, the lot number and third party paperwork reveal more than the claim.

05

Sort out proprietary blends without a per ingredient dose

Blends are where comparison grows harder. In a proprietary blend, the weight of the blend and every ingredient within the blend has to be disclosed, but not the amount of each ingredient within the blend. Proprietary blends may be marked as blend, complex, matrix or proprietary formulation, with only the total combined amount stated and ingredients in descending order by weight. The exact dose of any single ingredient inside such a blend, when only total blend weight appears, is something the evidence does not show.

This pattern shows up often. As of April 2022 in the NIH Dietary Supplement Label Database, 34 percent of labels used blends and 21 percent used proprietary blends. A reader who finds several botanicals grouped under one total weight is therefore seeing a normal industry practice, not an anomaly.

What to review when doses are grouped

Locate the blend name and its total weight first. Verify that each ingredient within the blend is named. Verify order, because ingredients have to appear in descending order by weight. Note which ingredient opens and which closes, because the first ingredient dominates the blend even when its exact milligrams remain hidden. Treat stimulant blends with added care, because grouped amounts block dose comparison, intake estimates and trial dosing checks.

Proprietary blends guard formulas yet conceal single doses, which limits dose comparison, intake estimates and trial dosing. Keep that tradeoff in mind when you choose what joins your morning or night stack. When dose matters for comparison between two jars, the jar with per ingredient weights permits math that the blended jar does not. When the maker shares lot level certificates or third party details that quantify blend components, that paperwork narrows the gap.

FROM THE EDITORS

Read that disclaimer as a statement about review status, not as a comment on whether the product works, since structure function claims describe the role of a nutrient intended to affect normal structure or function, require a disclaimer that FDA has not evaluated the claim and that the product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent disease, and the maker must submit proof to FDA within 30 days of marketing.

06

Weigh cost and check seals, lots and claims

Price comparison begins once dose is clear. Price per unit can be checked by entering price, servings per container and units per serving, with matching units such as mg versus mg. The manual version calls for only two divisions. Take the jar price and divide by servings per container to get price per serving. Then divide that result by units per serving to get price per mg or gram. Compare matching units only.

A short example helps keep the math clear enough to use on a busy day. A 30 dollar jar with 30 servings works out to 1 dollar per serving. If one serving lists 500 mg of your target ingredient, that equals 2 dollars per gram. A cheaper jar with a smaller serving weight may cost more per gram, and a larger jar with more capsules per serving may cost more per day. Blends break this math at the second step, because per ingredient units are missing and only total blend weight is stated.

Paperwork comes next. Search for third party seals, lot numbers, maker name and address, and structure function disclaimers. FDA does not approve dietary supplement facilities or makers, and no official FDA Approved seal exists for products. A seal that implies otherwise misleads. A lot number links the jar to a batch and to any certificate of analysis the maker can supply. The panel alone cannot show the full safety and quality past of your jar without lot testing, maker records or third party certification specifics.

Front claims close the loop. Structure function wording has to carry the FDA disclaimer noted above. Identity, net contents and contact details have to show under labeling rules. When any of those marks are missing, or when the seal cannot be checked with the named certifier, set

the jar aside until the maker provides documents. Traceable jars earn the shelf. Opaque jars wait.

07

The checklist

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- ☐ Write serving size with its form word
 - ☐ Verify servings per container or net contents
 - ☐ Scale each amount to the servings used
 - ☐ Log each dietary ingredient name plus unit
 - ☐ Log the parenthetical form for each nutrient
 - ☐ Confirm weights mean nutrient weight
 - ☐ Use percent Daily Value for sorting only
 - ☐ Scan Other Ingredients by role, not length
 - ☐ Mark blends, complexes, matrixes and proprietary formulas
 - ☐ Confirm blend order runs heaviest first
 - ☐ Work out price per serving from jar price
 - ☐ Calculate price per mg or gram using matched units to compare value clearly.
 - ☐ Locate maker name, address, lot and seals
 - ☐ Check disclaimers and set aside FDA Approved seals
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Sources and further reading

- [How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label · fda.gov](#)
- [Dietary Supplement Labeling Guide · fda.gov](#)
- [Perspectives on the Use of Proprietary Blends in Dietary Supplements · pmc.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](#)

For information only, not medical advice. These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration; supplements are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. Check with a doctor or pharmacist before starting one, especially if you are pregnant, nursing or take medication.



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Ashley produces the interviews at The Daily Capsule: the research, the question lists, the follow-ups. Her favorite question comes last, when she asks a founder exactly when, and with what, they take their own product.
