

Zinc

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Zinc is a natural mineral that plays important roles in the brain. It treats depression, insomnia, and ADHD in clinical trials. In anorexia, zinc improves mood, anxiety, and weight. Zinc is also involved in immune function and eye health, and is often used to ease symptoms of a cold.

How it Works

Zinc helps serotonin bind to neurons, balances stress hormones, and reduces toxic neurotransmitters like glutamate. It aids sleep by enhancing melatonin release.

In most conditions, zinc works regardless of whether your levels are low. There are several reasons why people have low zinc: Vegetarian diet, anorexia, use of reflux medications, and hypothyroidism. In ADHD, zinc is only effective in people with low levels.

Zinc may be particularly helpful for depression with obesity. It may help people gain sobriety from opioid use.

Dosage

Zinc is taken once a day at night. The dose is 15-50 mg at night. Most studies used 25-50 mg; trials of insomnia used lower doses. Zinc is available through several salt binding agents (gluconate, sulfate, picolinate, monomethionine, glycinate). All forms have been used successfully, but keep in mind the dosage is based on the amount of zinc in the product, not the salt/binding agent.

Choosing a product

Zinc can be taken as a prescription or over the counter. A reasonably priced option that was tested for purity by ConsumerLabs are the Vitacost and Solgar brands. Other products that passed the test include GNC, Garden of Life, Swanson, Jarrow, and Life Extension.

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Side effects, risks, and drug interactions

Zinc is safe and well tolerated in normal doses. Fiber can reduce absorption of zinc but zinc not appear to interact with other medications.

Limitations

Zinc has not been widely studied. Its safety is not regulated by the FDA.

—Chris Aiken, MD, updated 7/14/2025