



FAQs – Food supplements For consumers

11 April 2024

▪ **What are food supplements?**

Answer: Food supplements (FS) are ordinary foodstuffs. They are not therapeutic products. They are available in concentrated form and supplement the normal diet. They contain vitamins, minerals and other substances with a nutritional or physiological effect (e.g. amino acids, fatty acids). FS are sold in small quantities. They differ from other foodstuffs in their dosage form, e.g. as capsules, tablets or sachets of powder.

▪ **Where are food supplements regulated?**

Answer: FS are foodstuffs and are therefore covered by food legislation. The FDHA Ordinance on Food Supplements (FoodSO; SR 817.022.14) sets out the specific requirements. However, the overarching general and specific legal provisions of food regulation also apply, e.g. with regard to labelling.

▪ **What substances can be used in food supplements?**

Answer: The acceptable vitamins and minerals that can be used in FS are conclusively regulated. Maximum levels have been defined for many vitamins and minerals. For health protection reasons, these maximum levels should not be exceeded. Further information on the new maximum level model is available on the FSVO [website](#).

For certain other substances, such as essential fatty acids and essential amino acids, maximum levels have been defined, together with warnings and additional conditions of use where necessary. FS may also contain other substances that are not specifically regulated, as long as they are safe and meet the legal requirements. For these substances, the manufacturer or distributor is personally responsible for ensuring compliance with the requirements, particularly with regard to health. To this end, they can refer to the [Information letter 2021/7.1: Self-supervision of non-regulated other substances in food supplements](#). Certain substances that may be contained in FS require authorisation, however (e.g. novel foods).

▪ **Who guarantees that food supplements are safe?**

Answer: Food supplements are not subject to any authorisation procedures. In such a procedure, product safety would have to be proven before they could be placed on the market. Responsibility for complying with the legal requirements lies with the manufacturer or distributor. In particular, products must not be harmful to health and the way they are presented and advertised must not mislead consumers. The cantonal enforcement authorities check the products on the market on a random basis.

▪ **When is it advisable to take food supplements?**

Answer: People who eat a balanced and varied diet do not generally need to take FS. Supplements cannot compensate for a poor, unbalanced diet either. This must be stated on the packaging of FS. For certain population groups, however, taking food supplements temporarily can be advisable. These groups include e.g. women who are trying to conceive, those who are pregnant and older adults.

▪ **Can food supplements be advertised as therapeutic products?**

Answer: No. The intended use of FS is to supplement the normal diet with vitamins (e.g. vitamin C), minerals (e.g. iron) or other substances (e.g. essential fatty acids). They are not intended to cure, provide relief from, or prevent illnesses. FS may not be advertised using medicinal claims or

be presented as therapeutic products. Caution is therefore advised in the case of dubious suppliers who try to sell food supplements to prevent or treat illnesses.

▪ **What claims are food supplements allowed to make?**

Answer: Health claims are allowed if they are listed in Annex 14 to the FDHA Ordinance on Information on Foodstuffs (FoodIO; SR 817.022.16), or if they have been authorised by the FSVO and fulfil the conditions for use in a FS (e.g. vitamin D helps maintain normal bones).

▪ **Are there any regulations on the labelling of food supplements?**

Answer: Yes. General regulations apply, as for all foodstuffs. There are also specific requirements for the labelling of FS. The mandatory information must be provided in at least one Swiss official language, i.e. in German, French or Italian.

▪ **What specific labelling regulations exist for food supplements?**

Answer:

The specific designation 'food supplement' must feature on the packaging.

The following information must also be listed on a FS (Art. 3 para. 7 FoodSO):

- the portion of the product recommended for daily consumption;
- a warning not to exceed the stated recommended daily dose;
- a statement saying that FS should not be used as a substitute for a varied diet;
- a statement saying that the products should be stored out of the reach of young children;
- where necessary, warnings or an indication of a specific target group or conditions of use (substance specific);
- the names of the categories of vitamins, minerals or other substances that characterise the product, or an indication of the nature of these vitamins, minerals or other substances.

Instead of a nutrition declaration, the amounts of vitamins, minerals and other substances, and where applicable their percentage of the reference values per recommended daily dose must be stated.

▪ **Can products be imported from abroad for personal use if they don't comply with the Swiss legislation?**

Answer: Foodstuffs legislation does not apply to the import of foodstuffs or utility articles intended for private domestic use. Importing foodstuffs that do not comply with Swiss legislation for personal use is therefore in principle allowed (Art. 2 para. 4 let. b FoodA). The import and consumption of such products is at consumers' [own risk](#).

In certain cases, a FS from abroad may be deemed a therapeutic product in Switzerland and be subject to the provisions of the Therapeutic Products Act. [Swissmedic](#) can provide information on therapeutic products.

The [Federal Office for Customs and Border Security](#) is responsible for checking foodstuffs at the border (with the exception of food of animal origin).

▪ **What should people bear in mind if they order FS online?**

Answer: The legal regulations also apply to FS that are sold on the internet. The same information must be provided to consumers before purchase as in a sales store. The only exceptions are the minimum shelf life/best before date and the product lot.

FS that are sold on the internet may not be safe. Particular caution is advised in the case of food supplements offered for sale on foreign websites or websites without a full address, those advertised with exaggerated claims ('miracle cure'), or that are not labelled in one of Switzerland's official languages. Further information can be found on the FSVO [website](#).