

Are Vitamin and Mineral Supplements Really Necessary?

Experts agree there is definitely a place for vitamin or mineral supplements in our diets, however, their primary function is to “supplement” a healthy diet, not replace it. According to Roberta Anding, MS, RD, a spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association, “. . . it is shortsighted to think your vitamin or mineral is the ticket to good health - - the big power is on the plate, not in a pill.” Whole foods contain phytochemicals and fiber that work together to promote good health.



A supplement can help take up the nutritional slack when the food on the plate doesn't include essential nutrients like calcium, potassium, vitamins D and B12. Many studies have shown the health benefits of supplementing missing nutrients in the diet to prevent chronic health problems. A National Institutes of Health (NIH) study found increased bone density and reduced fractures in postmenopausal women who took calcium and vitamin D supplements.

Who May Need Vitamin and Mineral Supplements?

- Pregnant and lactating women
- Vegans and some people on vegetarian diets
- Anyone on a low-calorie diet (intentional and unintentional)
- Certain gastrointestinal and other disease states (including people with a history of cancer)
- Anyone having gastric bypass surgery
- People who suffer from food allergies or intolerances
- Picky eaters who limit food groups, or have limited variety within food groups
- Anyone with a poor diet
- People taking certain medications

Take stock of your diet habits. Evaluate what is missing in your diet. Are there entire food groups you avoid? Is iceberg lettuce or french fries the only vegetables you eat? Try to fill your grocery cart with a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables, whole grains, low fat dairy and lean proteins like fish and chicken. Read up on what foods supply which nutrients. When in doubt, taking a daily multivitamin is a safer bet than a cocktail of individual supplements that can exceed the safe upper limits of the recommended intake for any nutrient. Choose a multivitamin that provides 100% or less of the Daily Value (DV) as a backup to plug the small nutrient holes in your diet. Some supplements can build up in toxic amounts so avoid megadosing.

Don't rely on the clerk in the health food store to tell you what supplements you may need to take. Consult your personal doctor or a registered dietitian when deciding if you need a supplement. An overall healthy diet and regular physical activity can go a long way to help prevent chronic disease, not supplements. For more information on how to choose a healthy diet, check out www.MyPlate.gov.

Source: *WebMD*

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