

Multivitamins: Now, More Than Ever

By Jerry Hickey, R.Ph.

Multivitamins have come a long way from those little round pills our mothers gave us. Today we know a great deal more about the importance of the nutrients found in a comprehensive multivitamin/mineral supplement. A large and growing body of scientific data indicates that a superior supplement offers numerous benefits to protect our health.

Who May Need a Multivitamin Supplement?

A diet rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains—with more reliance on fish and poultry—is the main nutritional component of a healthy lifestyle. But it is now becoming clear that even the most selective diets may still be lacking in essential nutrients needed to achieve optimal wellness. The healthiest diets may not supply some of us with levels of nutrients needed to fully support our immune system, prevent disease and help slow the aging process.

A multivitamin/mineral supplement contains nutrients that lower our risk of developing serious conditions, including cardiovascular disease, loss of vision and a number of cancers. An evidence-based multivitamin can be a major player in preventing disease while ensuring general well-being.

If you are currently taking prescription or over-the-counter medications, these pharmaceuticals may deplete your body of

key nutrients or cause negative drug/nutrient interactions. Included in this list are the most commonly used drugs, including birth control pills, hormone replacement therapy, antihistamines, asthma medication, anti-inflammatory drugs, antibiotics, drugs for hypertension and cholesterol regulation, and many others. If you are on these medications, check with your healthcare specialist to be certain you are replenishing the valuable nutrients that medications are interacting with or depleting.

Some populations who may require a nutrient supplement include:

- People who routinely omit a major food group from their regular diet (for example, strict vegetarians, people who are lactose-intolerant or vegetable-haters)

- People who are habitual dieters (restriction of energy and variety)
- Pregnant and lactating women, plus women of childbearing age who don't eat enough vegetables, dried beans and fruits
- Heavy smokers and/or alcohol drinkers
- Elderly people who:
 - Cannot easily obtain or prepare food
 - Have limited finances
 - Have chewing, swallowing or digestive disorders
- People on many medications that interfere with the body's use of specific nutrients
- People whose stress levels frequently keep them from eating the recommended amount and variety of nutritious foods
- People who have a chronic disease, infection or illness that impairs absorption of nutrients
- People who have undergone extensive surgery
- Athletes and bodybuilders

Who Sets the Standards for Vitamins and Minerals?

America's oldest nutritional guidelines, the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs), are established by a group of three dozen of the country's expert scientists, who represent a variety of specialties. It is important to recognize that the RDAs are neither minimum requirements nor optimal intakes; they are estimated average daily intakes for healthy individuals. Issued and revised by the National Academy of Sciences, the guidelines have become more comprehensive in recent years. One new measurement is the Upper Intake Level (UL), which specifies the upper safety limit of certain nutrients.



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