



Nutri-Facts

Issue #4

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Greetings all!

An estimated one-half of Americans spend \$4 billion dollars on various vitamin and mineral supplements. Research suggests that the majority of supplements being used are multivitamin/mineral supplements.

Have you checked out the multivitamin/mineral supplements available at your local health food, grocery, or discount store? Some of the supplements contain everything from "A to Zinc." Some include herbs and phytochemicals. There are special multivitamin/mineral supplements for people over 50, and for those who have to deal with stress. We even have supplements specially formulated for men, women, and children. It's no wonder that many of our clients are asking the question "Which supplement is right for me?"

Before we help our clients answer that question, we first need to help them decide if they really need a multivitamin/mineral supplement. Healthy people can usually obtain the nutrients they need from a healthful diet. However, there are several factors that prevent this from happening; therefore, some individuals may benefit from taking a multivitamin/mineral supplement.

In this issue, there is information on multivitamins/minerals, why individuals use them, factors that may warrant the use of a multivitamin/mineral supplement, and what to look for when selecting a supplement. A simple "quiz" developed by the American Dietetic Association is also included on a client fact sheet to help them determine if they really need a multivitamin/mineral supplement. A brief news release is also included for your use.

As always, I welcome any feedback/comments you have about Nutri-Facts.

Eat Well!

Agent Information Sheet, Nutri-Facts #4

Frequently asked questions about multivitamin/mineral supplements

1. What are dietary supplements?

A dietary supplement is defined as "a product intended to supplement the diet. It contains one or more vitamin, mineral, herb, or amino acid ingredients."

2. What is a vitamin?

Vitamins are organic compounds that we must have to maintain normal body functions. They are usually available in foods, although many vitamins are produced synthetically. With the exception of vitamin E and folate, synthetic vitamins work in the body just like vitamins from natural sources. Natural vitamin E appears to be absorbed more readily than its synthetic form. On the other hand, folic acid, the synthetic form of folate appears to be absorbed more readily than the natural folate found in food. Folic acid is of importance to women of childbearing age, since consuming 400 micrograms of folic acid (along with a healthy diet), before and during the first few weeks of pregnancy may reduce the risk of giving birth to a child with a neural tube defect by as much as 70%.

3. What is a mineral?

Minerals are found naturally in foods and are essential to many basic tasks the body must perform. They are especially important in bone structure and growth. Some of the minerals found naturally in foods include calcium, iron, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium, and sodium. In dietary supplements, minerals are not available as single elements but rather as compounds. Therefore, a product label may say "calcium carbonate" for calcium or "ferrous sulfate" for iron.

4. Who takes multivitamin/mineral supplements (referenced as multivitamins from this point forward) and why?

An estimated 40% of Americans take multivitamins. There are several reasons why people use multivitamins:

- ★ to improve their nutrition
- ★ to make up for nutrients missing in their food supply (example: a person does not consume milk or other dairy products because of lactose intolerance. Since dairy products are a great source of calcium, an individual might use a calcium supplement to insure he/she is getting the recommended amount of calcium.
- ★ to decrease their risk of acquiring a disease
- ★ to increase energy or improve athletic performance

5. Should everyone take a multivitamin?

For most Americans, following current dietary recommendations is an easy way to ensure that one's diet contains the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients necessary for good health. However, food preferences, hectic lifestyles, or other factors can often prevent consumers from eating a nutritious diet. For some people, a multivitamin may be beneficial if:

- ★ they have a hectic lifestyle that prevents them from following current dietary recommendations
- Note from Jenna:** A multivitamin is not a substitute for a nutritious diet!
- ★ they are on a low-calorie diet for weight loss (usually less than 1200 calories)

- ★ they are elderly and not eating as much as they should
- ★ they are a strict vegetarian (no animal products including eggs, meat, or milk)
- ★ they can't or won't drink milk or consume other dairy products (in this case, ice cream doesn't count as a calcium-rich dairy food)
- ★ they are women of childbearing age (i.e. they could become pregnant even if they are not planning to do so at the moment)

6. How is the product quality of multivitamins (and other dietary supplements) regulated?

Multivitamins and other dietary supplements are regulated as foods by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). However, there are no set government standards for the manufacturing of multivitamins and other dietary supplements. Therefore, it is "buyer beware."

So, how can someone be sure they are getting a quality multivitamin? There are several non-government agencies that which sets standards for drug products and dietary supplements. One agency is the U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP). A dietary supplement that meets USP standards will have the initials "USP" on the label. The only way that individuals can be sure a product meets USP quality standards is if "USP" is specifically mentioned on the label.

For more information about the U.S. Pharmacopeia, check out this web site: <http://www.usp-dsvp.org/>

7. What are some tips for selecting a multivitamin supplement?

- ★ Unless suggested by your health care provider, choose a multivitamin supplement that provides no more than 100% of the Daily Value (DV) for vitamins and minerals. Excessive amounts of some vitamins and minerals may actually do more harm than good.
- ★ Vitamin A in multivitamins may come in the form of retinol (the fat-soluble form), beta-carotene (the water-soluble form), or both. Excessive amounts of retinol may be harmful, so try to select a multivitamin that has at least 50% of the vitamin A in the form of beta-carotene. Keep in mind that the DV of vitamin A should not exceed 100%, regardless of the form.
- ★ Most multivitamins will not provide 100% of the DV for calcium because the added calcium would make the supplement too big to swallow. If extra calcium is required, a separate calcium supplement may be indicated.
- ★ Choose a supplement that is clearly marked with an expiration date far enough in the future to enable use of all the product. Do not use the product after its expiration date, as certain vitamins lose their potency over time, especially in hot and humid climates.
- ★ Remember that the price of the multivitamin is not always the best judge of the product's quality.
- ★ Look for a multivitamin supplement that meets USP standards.

Additional References:

Use of Dietary Supplements in the United States, 1988-1994. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for health Statistics, June 1999.

Nayga RM, Reed DB. Factors Associated with the Intake of Dietary Supplements. *Family Economics and Nutrition Review*, 1999;12:43-48.

American Dietetic Association. www.eatright.org

DO I NEED A MULTIVITAMIN/MINERAL SUPPLEMENT?

Nutrition experts agree that the Food Guide Pyramid offers an easy-to-follow plan for healthful eating. Eating the "pyramid way" means choosing a suitable number of servings and a variety of foods from each of the five Food Guide Pyramid food groups. This is generally the best way to get all the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients you need. Challenge yourself with the following quiz to rate your eating habits.

On most days do you:

1. Eat 6 to 11 servings breads, cereal, rice, pasta, or other grain foods? One serving equals one slice of bread, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of rice or pasta or 1 ounce of cereal.



Yes = 3

No = 0

2. Eat at least 2 servings of fruit? One serving equals 1 piece of fruit, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cooked or canned fruit, or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of 100% fruit juice.

Yes = 3

No = 0

3. Eat at least 3 servings of vegetables each day? One serving equals $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cooked vegetables, 1 cup of raw, leafy vegetables, or $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of vegetable juice.



Yes = 3

No = 0

4. Generally eat the same foods every day?

Yes = 0

No = 3

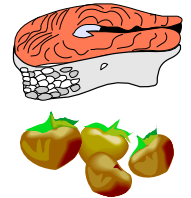
5. Eat 2 or more servings of dairy foods such as milk, cheese, and yogurt each day? One serving equals 1 cup of milk or yogurt, $1\frac{1}{2}$ ounces of natural cheese, or 2 ounces of processed cheese.



Yes = 3

No = 0

6. Eat 2 to 3 servings of lean meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs, or nuts every day? One serving equals 2-3 ounces of cooked lean meat, poultry, or fish. One egg, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cooked beans, or 2



tablespoons of peanut butter count as 1 ounce of meat.

Yes = 3

No = 0

7. Often skip meals or miss out on one or more food groups for the entire days?

Yes = 0

No = 3

Add up your responses for your total score. Then, look on the back of this sheet to see how well you are eating and whether a multivitamin/mineral supplement might be right for you.

SCORING:

15 points or more: Food Guide Pyramid Expert. You know how to make wise food choices and get the variety of foods important for a healthy eating plan.

9-12 points: You're on your way... You could be getting more nutrients by fine-tuning your food selections. For example, if you fall short in the grain group, try including at least one more serving of grains daily.

0-6 points: Keep trying! By making small changes, you can improve your eating pattern. Look at the Food Guide Pyramid guidelines. Focus on one food group at a time, and try to eat the minimum number of servings for that group each day. And while food is the best way to obtain vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients, you may benefit from a multivitamin/mineral supplement if you are unable to eat from all the food groups.

Even people with the best intentions sometimes fall short on their nutrient intake. For some people, a vitamin/mineral supplement offers benefits that are both safe and effective. A multi-vitamin/mineral supplement may help when:

- ◆ your lifestyle keeps you from eating the recommended number of servings from the Food Guide Pyramid.
- ◆ you are on a very low calorie weight loss diet.
- ◆ you are elderly and not eating as much as you should.
- ◆ you are a strict vegetarian (no animal products in your diet, including meat, milk, cheese, and eggs).
- ◆ you can't drink milk or eat cheese and yogurt.
- ◆ you are a woman of child-bearing age who does not get enough folate from fruits, vegetables, beans, and grains

For more information about multivitamin/mineral supplements, contact your local registered dietitian or county agent.

Source: The American Dietetic Association.

Educational programs of Texas Cooperative Extension are open to all people without regard to race, color, sex, disability, religion, age, or national origin.



To Supplement or Not to Supplement?

Jane consumes a donut and diet cola for breakfast. Her lunch comes from the vending machines at work. Dinner is courtesy of the drive-through window at her favorite restaurant. She worries that her eating habits are not providing her with enough of the nutrients that she needs to stay healthy, so she takes a multivitamin/mineral supplement. Jane's friend Sam usually eats oatmeal, a scrambled egg, and juice for breakfast. His lunch comes from the local deli and consists of a sandwich made with whole wheat bread, lean meats, and lots of vegetables. He snacks on fruit when hungry and prepares his evenings meal at home after a 2-hour workout at the gym. Sam takes his multivitamin/mineral supplement so he can have extra energy.

Sam and Jane represent typical individuals who use dietary supplements. Nationwide, almost one-half of Americans use supplements, at an annual cost of nearly \$4 billion dollars. Some of the most popular supplements are multivitamin/mineral supplements. According to Jenna Anding, PhD, RD, LD, assistant professor and Extension nutrition specialist, "people use vitamin and mineral supplements for many reasons - to make up for poor eating habits, to help prevent disease, and to increase their energy to improve performance.

Should everyone be taking multivitamin/mineral supplements? Nutrition experts suggest that following the Food Guide Pyramid is one way to ensure that we are getting all of the nutrients that we need. However, individual food preferences and hectic lifestyles can make following the Food Guide Pyramid a challenge. In these instances, a multivitamin/mineral supplement might be beneficial. Individuals might also benefit from a multivitamin/mineral supplement if:

- they are on a low-calorie weight loss diet (usually less than 1200 calories)
- they are elderly and not eating much
- they are a strict vegetarian (no animal products including meat, milk, cheese, and eggs)
- they can't or won't consume milk or other calcium-rich dairy products
- they are women of child-bearing age

For individuals who decide to use multivitamin/mineral supplements, Anding has the following advice:

- "Choose a multivitamin/mineral supplement that provides no more than 100% of the Daily Value for the references vitamins and minerals. Some vitamins and minerals can be harmful when taken in high doses.
- Make sure that you select a supplement that is marked with an expiration date far enough in the future to enable the use of all of the product. Some vitamins lose potency with time, so do not use the multivitamin/mineral supplement after its expiration date.
- The price of a multivitamin/mineral supplement is not always a sign of quality. Select a multivitamin/mineral supplement that meets USP (U.S. Pharmacopeia) standards to help

ensure that the supplement selected is of high quality. Look for the initials USP on the label. Many times, store-brand multivitamin/mineral supplements are just as good, and more economical, than national brands.

For most people who consume a healthful diet, taking a multivitamin/mineral supplement probably won't cause harm, but may not help either. The body can't store most of the excess nutrients, so it eliminates them. The result? "Expensive urine," says Anding.

Finally, Anding cautioned that people cannot use a multivitamin/mineral supplement as a substitute for a poor diet. "Every day we are discovering more about the disease fighting properties of chemicals found in foods, especially fruits and vegetables. If we rely on a multivitamin/mineral supplement to keep us healthy we may be missing out on these chemicals as well as fiber. Food tastes better than supplements, so we should try to improve our diets by following the Food Guide Pyramid. A supplement is no substitute for a healthful diet."

For more information about dietary supplements or to learn how to improve your eating habits, contact _____, County Extension Agent at _____ (phone number).