
Your Guide to Vitamin Supplementation

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Before picking up that bottle of vitamin E that your neighbor thought you should buy, find out if you really need it. Too many people purchase too many supplements without fully understanding how their health can be affected, sometimes adversely, by natural products. You should never self-diagnose or self-prescribe!

Your first step should not be into a health food store, but into a nutritionist's office. The only way to really make sure you are taking appropriate vitamin formulas is to find a qualified professional who specializes in nutritional supplements. This person will develop an individualized nutrition program for you. If you are going to spend money on dietary supplements, shouldn't you know which products are best for you? Which products may have side effects? Which products are best absorbed? Which products may be used with your current prescription medications? All of these questions and more can be answered with the help of a knowledgeable health care provider.

Once you have supplementation recommendations in hand, follow these basic guidelines to ensure optimal therapeutic benefits. Remember that even though many supplements can work on their own, taking just a few supplements may cause nutrient deficiencies or imbalances. Dietary supplements can work even better when they are part of a holistic health plan that includes proper dietary habits and lifestyle choices.

Tips for Optimal Supplementing

- Divide your doses over the course of the day. Your body can absorb and use only so much of a vitamin or mineral at one time.
- Purchase supplements that do not contain fillers, additives or coal tars that are unnecessary and even harmful. Truly effective, absorbable supplements cost a little more than drug store brands. If you want effective products, you are going to have to pay for them.
- One of the best delivery systems for nutritional supplements is gelatin capsules containing powdered, uncompressed compounds.

- If one or more supplements upset your stomach, stop taking them and begin to take the recommended dose of one supplement at a time. Add a new one every two to three days until you determine which one is bothering you. Check the label to ensure there are no fillers or potential allergens in the pills.
- Take all supplements with food unless otherwise specified. It is best to take supplements just prior to a meal or during a meal. This may decrease digestive intolerances to certain nutrients.
- If you have trouble swallowing your supplements, try taking them with a thicker liquid such as fruit juice or vegetable juice or a yogurt and fruit smoothie.
- It is not necessary to purchase dietary supplements derived from natural substances. Synthetic vitamins are just as bioavailable to the body. The only exception may be vitamin E. Studies have shown the naturally occurring form of vitamin E is better utilized by the body. Choose d-alpha tocopherol or mixed tocopherols.
- Time-released supplements are generally not recommended. Studies have shown that absorption may actually be decreased with sustained release products because blood levels are not effectively raised. Some time-released vitamins can be toxic to the liver!
- Minerals that are chelated (bound) to carry proteins are expensive and studies are not conclusive that this form enhances absorption. Keep in mind that minerals taken with a meal are usually chelated to agents during digestion.
- Store supplements in a cool, dry and dark place. Check your product for expiration dates. Avoid the temptation to purchase discounted products that are due to expire.
- If you transfer your supplements from the original container to smaller more convenient containers, the shelf-life is lessened.