

DO YOU REALLY NEED TO TAKE VITAMINS?

Do you want to be thinner, look and feel younger, have better health and increased energy? Oh, don't we all?? Turn on your television, radio, log into your computer, and chances are you will be bombarded with information about all types of vitamin and supplement products that are supposed to help us achieve these goals.

However, the question should be asked: do supplements and vitamins really work? Does the average person need to take them?

This is something that interests me. My doctor has me on a vitamin regimen, I wondered if I really need it. So, I did a bit of web surfing about vitamins. There's some interesting information out there! I found that, actually, most people who eat a sensible, healthy and well-balanced diet don't need to take vitamin pills. There is absolutely no substitute for fresh and healthy foods. However, for some folk with various medical and dietary issues, bottled vitamins may be of some assistance. Is this you? It certainly is me. I don't eat right (I admit it!), don't get enough exercise, and, as I'm staring at the age of 70 soon, don't get out as much into the fresh air and sunshine as I certainly should.

Here is a little of what I discovered.

Real food is better!

Vitamins and minerals are found in whole foods and fruits and vegetables. The exact amounts and unique combinations can never be replicated in a pill. Fresh fruits and vegetables also have several other benefits over vitamin pills:

* **greater variety of nutrition.** Fresh fruit doesn't contain just *one* vitamin or mineral, but many, as well as other essential nutrients. These complex ingredients can't be found in a vitamin.

* **fiber** is found in many fruits and vegetables. Fiber is essential for maintaining good bowel health, as well as reducing harmful cholesterol (LDL), and reducing the risk of heart disease and diabetes. An added benefit is that high fiber foods will also make you feel fuller for longer. To replicate the fiber benefits found in whole foods and fruits and vegetables, one would have to be consuming several different types of manufactured fiber products daily.

* **naturally occurring antioxidants.** Antioxidants are important for fighting aging, repairing cell damage, and mopping up free radicals in the system. Recent research has

proven that antioxidant supplements may actually be hazardous to your health when taken in inappropriate amounts. However, there is nothing harmful about consuming a variety of colorful and fresh fruits and vegetables.

Who really needs vitamin pills?

Vitamins can help those people who have limited dietary intakes or may suffer from any of these conditions:

- * pregnant and nursing mothers. Women can also benefit from taking folic acid prior to becoming pregnant.
- * severe calorie restricted diets. Those who do not eat adequate portions of food will not be able to meet their daily nutritional requirements.
- * vegetarians who do not adequately substitute animal products.
- * some medical conditions and food allergies can leave those people deficient in specific nutrients. In these instances, you should discuss your individual requirements with your doctor. He may even refer you to a nutritional specialist.
- * people who have had gastric bypass operations for weight loss suffer from nutritional deficiencies and do need to take a quality vitamin supplement.
- * people who are living in isolated locations and do not have access to fresh foods.

Use caution when taking vitamins

If you fall into one of the categories of folk who may benefit from a vitamin supplement bear these points in mind:

- * bigger is not necessarily better. Mega-dose vitamins should be avoided. An over-supply of vitamins can sometimes be more dangerous than an under supply. Well-rounded vitamins that supply a good percentage of recommended daily requirements are best.
- * check the expiration date. Many vitamins lose their potency as they age. Look for those with the longest shelf life. Expired vitamins should not be taken.
- * take as directed. Vitamins work best when you follow the instructions as to dosage and whether they should be taken before or after meals.
- * do not store vitamins in the bathroom or car. Hot and humid environments will destroy the nutrients rapidly.
- * be child smart. Do not leave your vitamins lying around within reach of children.
- * look for quality assurance labels. Various countries have differing organizations governing the vitamin industry. In the US, good quality vitamins will be verified by the label USP.

Conclusion

What I found is that, as a general consensus, vitamins can only help those who, for some reason, do not consume, or cannot adequately digest, whole foods and fresh fruits and vegetables. If you follow a healthy well-balanced diet of fresh foods, a vitamin supplement should not be necessary. It's decision you and your doctor should make together.

More to come...