

# How To Choose Nutritional Supplements

By Andrea Kramer

Unless you've been living in a cave for the last decade, you've heard health experts stressing the importance of eating more fruits and vegetables and fewer fats and carbs. The problem is that despite our best intentions, most of us don't get enough of the vitamins and minerals we need through diet alone. At the very minimum it is smart to take a multiple vitamin daily to help supplement the nutrients that you aren't getting through meals.

In addition to a multivitamin with minerals, most people can benefit from extra calcium and magnesium, B-complex vitamins, and omega 3-fatty acids. Vitamin C is a powerful antioxidant that can help strengthen your immune system.

Women who are pregnant or breast-feeding need to take additional vitamins. B-vitamins and folic acid are particularly important in safeguarding the health of both the baby and mother.

If you are a smoker you can benefit from taking a Vitamin C supplement. Smoking effects the absorption of many vitamins but several studies have shown that smokers are particularly deficient in Vitamin C.

People who are trying to lose weight and vegetarians often have multiple vitamin deficiencies. The most harmful deficiencies are from calcium, B vitamins, and Vitamin C. Vegetarians need to be especially vigilant in making sure they get enough vitamin B12 and Vitamin D. Those who do not eat dairy, eggs, or meat may have Vitamin A or iron deficiencies.

Many adults over 55 have significant vitamin and mineral deficiencies. Some studies have shown that older adults who don't get outdoors much can benefit from Vitamin D. The immune systems of elderly adults may also benefit from a daily supplement of Vitamin E.

Research has also shown that the following vitamins and minerals can be powerful allies in preventing heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

**Vitamin C--** Vitamin C acts as a powerful antioxidant. It is important for the production of collagen and may give the immune system a significant boost. Citrus fruits, bell peppers, broccoli, potatoes, red cabbage, cantaloupe and sweet potatoes are good sources of Vitamin C. Taking vitamin C supplements may also protect against stomach, esophageal, mouth and cervical cancers.

Vitamin D is essential in the absorption of calcium into the bone and for normal bone growth. Food sources include fortified milk, fatty fish, egg yolks and liver. Those who spend little time in the sun may need a Vitamin D supplement.

Vitamin E - This powerful vitamin may be beneficial in reducing the risk of heart disease and colon cancer. It has also been shown to help reduce hot flashes in women going through menopause. Food sources of Vitamin E include avocados, vegetable oils, nuts, wheat germ, beef liver, bran, and soybeans.

Chromium -- This powerful mineral makes your cells receptive to insulin and can normalize glucose and insulin levels. 120-200 mg. per day is recommended.

Magnesium -- Researchers have found the more magnesium in your diet, the less likely you are to develop diabetes. Generally foods high in fiber are also high in magnesium -- cereals, spinach, black-eyed peas and beans.

Folic Acid -- Folic acid has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease. Foods containing folates include orange juice, broccoli, spinach, and kidney beans. Most people need a multivitamin supplement to get 400 mcg per day.

Vitamin B-6-- Like folic acid, B6 helps reduce homocysteine levels, thereby reducing the risk of heart disease. Foods with B6 include bananas, lean chicken, brown rice and oats.

The B vitamins are essential for converting blood sugar into energy and they help with metabolic activity in the heart, muscles, nerves and red blood cells. Good sources of B vitamins include pork, oatmeal, corn, nuts, cauliflower, dried fortified cereals, and sunflower seeds. Alcohol causes significant depletion of the B vitamins.

Vitamin A and beta carotene are important in growth, bone development, night vision, reproduction and healthy skin. However Vitamin A supplements can be dangerous if taken in high doses for long periods of time.

If you are pregnant, nursing a baby or have a serious medical condition, you should consult your doctor before taking any vitamin supplements. He can evaluate your medical history, diet and current medications to determine which supplements are safe for you to take.