

Popping a Punch

Vitamins and minerals are the key to internal health, but what if your diet is deficient? Multivitamins and supplements can fill the void.



You like to consider yourself a fitness buff. You take pride in the 5K runs you take on a daily basis, the number of perfect crunches you do to maintain your sculpted abs, and the hundreds of squats and lunges performed every week to keep leg muscles lean and strong. You also make a point to watch what you eat, eliminating refined carbs, avoiding trans fats and filling the majority of your diet with lean proteins. But are you getting enough nutrients to keep your inner body healthy? Many nutritionists would argue that you're not, which is why if you aren't on a regimented vitamin and supplement plan, now's the time to start.

Filling the Gaps

Dietary guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Agriculture suggest men and women increase their intake of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products, identifying these specific food groups with increasing health benefits and reducing risk of disease, such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers.

Consider vitamin A, which is found in orange vegetables like carrots and sweet potatoes, red vegetables like tomatoes and red peppers, orange fruits like apricots and cantaloupe, and leafy greens like spinach and romaine lettuce. Study after study has shown this vitamin to be a carotenoid. Folate is so important to neurological development that pregnant women are immediately put on a folate-supplemented diet at the onset of their pregnancy. And everyone knows a good dose of vitamin C can ward off colds and basic illnesses.

While the USDA recommends nine daily servings of fruits and vegetables, Maria Fauscett, manager at Discount Nutrition in Marietta, a vitamin and supplement retailer, says, "There is no way you can get all your nutrients through your food. It's very hard, unless it's your complete life. You would need to eat six meals a day, be cooking all your own meals and eating constantly. It would have to be a lifestyle."

Which is why Fauscett recommends all men and women take multivitamins. And she's not alone. Even the Journal of the American Medical Association recommends all adults take a multivitamin daily to supplement a healthy diet, keep their immune systems strong and help stave off disease. Nutritionist Page Love of Atlanta's Nutri Fit Sport Therapy Inc. recommends multivitamins for filling nutritional gaps. "I often recommend multivitamins because they contain the major antioxidants and minerals that most people are lacking, mainly because they are not getting the recommended eight to 10 servings of fruits and vegetables each day," she says.

Gender-Specific Diets

Both men and women should be taking a daily multivitamin, but just as they have different bodies, so, too, do they have different needs. For women, bone loss begins at age 30, rapidly increasing as the years progress and often leading to osteoporosis, which is why Love recommends a multivitamin with added calcium as well as a calcium supplement.

"The calcium nutrient is often limited in women," Love says. "Even if

nutrition

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Key Nutrients

Look for daily multivitamins with the following, says the National Academy of Science's Institute of Medicine:

• Vitamin A	3,000 IU
• Vitamin C	75 mg for women 90 mg for men
• Vitamin D	200 IU
• Vitamin E	30 IU
• Vitamin K	120 mcg
• Vitamin B-12	6 mcg
• Iron	10 mg
• Folic Acid	400 mcg
• Calcium	1,000 mg
• Magnesium	100 mg
• Selenium	70 mcg
• Zinc	8 mg for women, 11 mg for men
• Chromium	20-25 mcg for women; 30-35 mcg for men

a woman gets three servings a day of dairy, a serving of yogurt may contain 300 milligrams (mg) of calcium, a glass of milk another 300 mg and a serving of cheese another 300 mg, which doesn't add up to the 1,500 mg RDA. The added calcium in a multivitamin is only about 300 mg, so women need that calcium supplement for the extra boost."

Women also need an extra dose of iron due to menstruation and to ward off anemia. Men, meanwhile, benefit from supplements offering prostate support or additional energy. Omega-3s, which provide healthy fatty acids, also are recommended for men to lower LDL, a.k.a., the bad cholesterol. And both sexes benefit from vitamins and supplements when dieting, since cutting calories also means cutting nutrients. Fauscett likes to recommend protein supplements to dieters, because a weight-loss diet should be mostly protein. Love admits that the B vitamins—B1 (thiamin), B2 (riboflavin), B3 (niacin), B6 and B12—most often found in proteins help dieters get more energy out of food and better combusts fuels.

Too Much of a Good Thing

Don't start popping pills just yet. Work with a nutritionist or qualified supplement provider to help determine your needs based on the foods you eat and the energy exhausted every day. Overloading on vitamins and supplements isn't the cure, as exceeding RDAs can range from minor aches and pains like headaches, stomach cramps and diarrhea to downright toxic, such as a Vitamin D overdose leading to kidney failure.

And while vitamins and supplements provide much-needed nutrients, they should be taken only to fill in the gaps of a healthy diet. The best way to get nutrients and minerals should first and foremost come from food, Love says. "I look for food adequacy," she says. "I review nutrients in a person's diet and compare it to minimal food pyramid guidelines. Then I recommend a food change to get the missing nutrient to get to that 100-percent of the RDA. When I can't do that with food because someone doesn't like certain food groups, shopping for fresh produce isn't easy or other factors, only then will I add a supplement to meet the need."

So if you have perfected your body on the outside and want to keep it running at peak performance, look inward to your nutrient intake and fill the gaps with multivitamins and supplements. It'll keep your body running more smoothly for years to come. —Lissa Poirot