

# Why take nutritional supplements?

You eat your fruits and vegetables and do your best to stay away from too much junk food. Aren't you getting all the nutrients you need to fight off illness and maintain a healthy lifestyle?

Not necessarily. Even when we eat right, it may be difficult to get everything we need in the quantities we need them.

The foundation for a health-promoting lifestyle is a balanced diet with a variety of nutrient-dense foods and beverages consumed in moderation along with ample physical activity. Despite the importance of eating a well-balanced diet, most people in the United States are not eating a diet with sufficient quantities of quality nutrients.

According to Dr. Kyle Daigle, DC, of Ultimate Performance Sports & Rehabilitation, "The standard American diet is full of refined sugars, highly processed carbohydrates, artificial flavorings and food additives, which creates a great burden to the immune system and can cause interferences in the nervous system.

"A comprehensive whole food supplement can combat most of those nutrient deficiencies. Muscles, joints and ligaments need nutrients and if we are not getting them from our daily diets, we need supplementation.

"To top things off, even if we do our best to make good food choices, we're not guaranteed to get the quality nutrition we need due to the fact that many whole foods are exposed to run-off water with pesticides and our soil has been depleted by over-farming. All reasons why supplementation is so important."

Carol Haggans, a registered dietitian and consultant to the National Institutes of Health, agrees with Dr. Daigle stating,



"Supplements can be useful for filling in gaps in your diet."

Additionally, many medications interfere with proper nutrient absorption which furthers the need for supplementation.

Evidence suggests that supplements such as multivitamins, calcium and vitamins B, C and D can enhance health in different ways. Calcium supports bone health, and vitamin D helps the body absorb calcium. Vitamins C and E are antioxidants — molecules that prevent cell damage and help to maintain health.

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Women need iron during pregnancy, and breastfed infants need vitamin D. Folic acid is also important for all women of childbearing age — 400 micrograms daily, whether from supplements or fortified food.

Vitamin B12 keeps nerve and blood cells healthy. "Vitamin B12 mostly comes from meat, fish and dairy foods, so vegans may consider taking a supplement to be sure to get enough of it," Haggans says.

## Who needs supplements?

It seems that we all might gain from taking dietary supplements. Growing children can benefit from multivitamins to support healthy tissue and bone formation. Because the ability to absorb nutrients from food actually decreases with age, supplementation becomes equally important for the older population. Additionally, athletes and those who exercise a lot may require nutrients beyond that of the typical population in order to support the added stress on the body.

## Ask your healthcare provider if nutritional supplements are right for you.

Nutritional supplements are products intended to supplement the diet. They are not drugs and, therefore, are not intended to treat, diagnose, mitigate, prevent, or cure diseases. Before making decisions about whether to take a supplement, talk to your healthcare provider who can consider your individual health circumstances, allergic conditions or any potential interactions with medications you may be taking.

## Resources

*What is a registered dietitian nutritionist?*  
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics website.  
Accessed August 16, 2017.

Freeland-Graves JH, Nitzke S; Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Position of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: total diet approach to healthy eating, 2013.

*Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2015-2020*. 8th ed. Washington, DC: Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion; 2015. Accessed August 30, 2017.

*NIH News in Health* newsletter, August 2013.