

How do I pick the right nutritional supplement for me?

Despite your best intentions, you don't always eat as you know you should and decide that you would benefit from supplementing your diet. How do you choose which supplement(s) to take? With thousands of vitamins, minerals and botanicals available in too many brands to name, it's easy to get overwhelmed.

Before making decisions about which supplement to take or even whether or not to take a supplement, talk to your healthcare provider who can take into account your individual health circumstances, allergies, and any potential interactions with your medications.

When you are ready to have that conversation, be prepared to discuss a number of considerations when choosing a nutritional supplement: the quality of the ingredients, the appropriate formula for your needs, the ease of adding a supplement to your daily routine, and the cost.

Quality

The ingredients in your supplements should be of high quality. In addition, supplements that include multiple ingredients should have the ingredients in combinations which work together to produce the best results. Results occur when those ingredients offer nutrition which is bioavailable to your cells. If the finest quality ingredients are not readily accepted by your body, then they will do little good. Fillers and additives may interfere with absorption.

With many people experiencing food sensitivities, a quality nutritional supplement also will be hypoallergenic. It will be free of a number of ingredients including wheat, gluten, dairy, soy, tree nuts, peanuts and shellfish. Be sure to check your label.

Quality does not end with the ingredients. Manufacturing is equally important. It is essential that the company that manufactures the supplement be reputable and follow the stringent guidelines of the



FDA. Dietary supplements are complex products. The FDA has established good manufacturing practices (GMPs) for dietary supplements to help ensure their identity, purity, strength, and composition. These GMPs are designed to prevent the inclusion of the wrong ingredient, the addition of too much or too little of an ingredient, the possibility of contamination, and the improper packaging and labeling of a product. The FDA audits the facilities that manufacture dietary supplements.

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Completeness

Not everyone needs a wide variety of supplementation. If you follow a well-balanced diet but have deficiencies in only an area or two or have a specific issue to address, you may need limited or targeted supplementation.

According to Carol Haggans, a registered dietitian and consultant to the National Institutes of Health, "Supplements can be useful for filling in gaps in your

diet." Most people could benefit from supplementation; a comprehensive multivitamin and mineral formula may be the most advantageous in this regard.

Dosage form, convenience and regimen compliance

No nutritional supplement will benefit you if you can't bring yourself to take it regularly. Therefore, daily compliance should be considered when choosing a supplement.

Are you willing to take multiple pills or capsules - often at various times of the day - or would an all-in-one supplement work better for you? If you have trouble swallowing pills or capsules, perhaps a chewable or liquid supplement would be preferable. The benefits of taking liquids include that they tend to absorb faster and more completely than a solid supplement that must be broken down by the digestive system. If you choose to go with a liquid supplement, make sure it's in a pleasant flavor that you will not avoid taking.

Value

Can you get all of this quality and convenience at a price you can afford? Look at the value of what you would be getting from a quality nutritional supplement and compare that to how much you typically pay for so-called "health food". Though those foods and beverages might have beneficial ingredients, many - like power bars and smoothies - have added fat, calories and sugars. Even fruits and vegetables can be quite pricey. It's not to say that fruits and vegetables aren't good for you; however, if all you ate were fruits and vegetables, you'd still be missing key nutrients in your diet.

Your healthcare provider will discuss these topics with you to determine if a nutritional supplement should be added to your daily routine, and, if so, which one is right for you.

Resources

NIH News in Health newsletter, August 2013
National Institutes of Health, Office of Dietary Supplements, July 2011