



Ask the Dietitian

vitamin supplements

It seems like there are so many vitamin and mineral supplements out there – each of them making different claims for health. How can I know which ones I should be taking and which ones I don't even need?

My patients often have several questions just like this one about dietary supplements. There are such a variety of supplements out there in so many different doses, it can be almost impossible to make an informed choice.

The best way to approach dietary supplements is to remember that they are just supplements. They are meant to fill in any nutrient gaps you may have in your dietary choices – they cannot replace a healthy diet. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) put out a report in 2006 stating that they could not determine if there was any great overriding chronic disease (i.e. heart disease or diabetes) prevention benefit or harm from taking vitamin or mineral supplements based on current research. The press report from this 2006 decision can be found here: <http://www.nih.gov/news/pr/may2006/od-17.htm>

Basically what the current science shows us is that supplements likely don't provide all the benefit they state they do for chronic disease prevention. The best chronic disease prevention is to be sure you have a balanced diet, daily exercise of 30-60 or more minutes, good quality sleep of 7-9 hours each night and good stress management. A registered dietitian can review your current dietary choices and lifestyle habits with you to determine if you are currently low on any specific vitamins or minerals such as calcium, vitamin D, or omega-3, and can help you determine how much of these supplements you should be taking if any.

If you have been diagnosed with a nutrient deficiency such as anemia, osteoporosis, or a vitamin D deficiency, your doctor may prescribe a pharmaceutical grade supplement to correct your deficiency. He may then recommend you take a daily supplement to provide 100% of your Daily Recommended Intake (DRI) once your deficiency has been corrected. This chronic supplementation may help prevent further deficiency.

Most of us can meet 100% of our DRI with a balanced diet, but for those who feel they should take a supplement, they just need to keep in mind that taking more than 100% of the DRI for nutrients doesn't provide many if any nutritional benefit and may even cause harm. Also you need to be cautious with taking large doses (more than 200% DRI) of vitamins and minerals or any herbals as they can interact with any medical therapy or medications we may be currently taking. Always be sure to tell your pharmacist and doctor of any supplements you may be taking on a regular basis, including fiber supplements, herbals, vitamins and mineral.

For more information about dietary and herbal supplements, check out the Heart Center of the Rockies Supplements vs Foods: Where to get your vitamins and minerals and our Herbal Medicines and Dietary Supplements handouts or call one of our registered dietitians at (970) 221-1000 to schedule an appointment. We can help you determine your dietary and supplement needs based on your age, health, activity level, and health goals

For further information please call our office and ask to speak to one of our Registered Dietitians
Fort Collins, Estes Park and Sterling (970) 221-1000, Loveland (970) 624-1800, Fort Morgan (970) 867-7900
Toll free (800) 459-4241, or visit www.heartcenteroftherockies.com

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