



Why we need Supplements

by Tracey Karele - AIM Nutritionist

If we all had the time and the means to eat three home-grown, balanced and nutritious meals a day in completely relaxed and unpolluted environments, then perhaps our need for supplementation would decrease. The reality is, however, that none of us live like that. Whole food supplements provide natural and convenient nutrition and simply make good sense for those of us living normal, hectic lives!

The food that we eat today is not as nutritious as the food eaten a few hundred years ago. A study conducted by the University of Texas found that levels of calcium, riboflavin, vitamin C, iron, potassium and protein in both vegetables and fruits has significantly declined since the year 1950. Chemical fertilisers, pollution and mineral-depleted soils are just a few of the factors that contribute to the reduced nutrient content of our food today. Food these days is also a lot more processed, and nutrient losses occur during heating, preserving, freezing, irradiation etc.

Food is not what it used to be

Also, we no longer live as simply as we did. Few of us slaughter our own livestock or eat our own fresh, home-grown produce mere hours after it has been picked. Fruits and vegetables can be weeks old by the time they end up in our shopping basket, having been picked long before and kept in storage. Fruit is often picked while still unripe, stored and then ripened with a gas (often ethylene) when it is needed. This practice negatively affects the nutritional value of the produce, as it doesn't get the chance to properly develop the nutrients that are abundantly present in sun-ripened produce such as anthocyanins, polyphenols or carotenoids (all powerful antioxidants).

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The truth is that most of us simply don't eat the way that we should anyway. In a recent survey, 41% of people reported consuming the recommended servings of vegetables per day and only 23% were consuming the recommended servings of fruit.

We don't get enough protection from food alone, we need help from supplements!

A study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association concluded that a low intake of certain vitamins is a risk factor for chronic diseases. For example, low levels of folic acid, and the vitamins B6 and B12 are risk factors for cardiovascular disease, neural tube defects, and colon and breast cancer. Low levels of calcium and vitamin D can contribute to osteopenia and bone fractures, and low levels of vitamins A, E, and C (the antioxidant vitamins) may increase the risk of several of the chronic diseases. The study also goes on to state that "most people do not consume an optimal amount of all vitamins by diet alone...it appears prudent for all adults to take vitamin supplements."

We cannot live on supplements alone; they will never be a substitute for a good diet and exercise

We also cannot place all our hope in them, as their effects are largely preventative rather than curative and it often takes some time to see their effects. Consumers also need to be well informed, there are many companies promoting "newly



discovered" pseudovitamins and concoctions that they claim are essential to our wellbeing. However, people have been kept alive solely on intravenous feedings containing all the known essential nutrients without developing any deficiency symptoms, so it is therefore highly unlikely that any vitamin or essential nutrient remains to be discovered.

Some people just need a little extra

Vitamins were originally used for the relief of clinically recognisable deficiency disorders. However these days, classic nutritional deficiency diseases caused by the inadequate intakes of specific vitamins and minerals are rare, largely due to public health measures e.g. the fortification of breads and cereals with certain B-vitamins, iodised salt etc.

Lifestyle choices

However, there are groups of people that need to supplement their diet because of their lifestyle, illness or disposition. Some individuals may need supplements because their food intake is less than ideal, i.e. strict vegetarians and vegans (individuals who consume only food from plant sources) who do not carefully monitor their diets can often receive inadequate iron, zinc, vitamin B12 or calcium.

Pregnancy & Breastfeeding

Some individuals require supplementation at certain times in their lives only. Pregnant and breastfeeding women, for example, have increased requirements for protein, zinc and iron. Pregnant women also require larger amounts of folate and vitamin B12 in particular, as these are required for the rapid cell proliferation that occurs during this period. Women that experience excessive menstrual bleeding often require iron supplements, and those with very low calorie intakes (i.e. individuals on weight-loss diets) may also need supplementation.

Reduced capacity to absorb nutrients

Elderly people may have difficulty with consuming a balanced diet because of problems with chewing or a lack of appetite, and may also have a reduced capacity to absorb certain nutrients. Smokers and even passive smokers (those who inhale the smoke of others) also have an increased need for certain nutrients, vitamin C in particular. Other groups

of people that may need dietary supplements include individuals with nutrient deficiencies; those addicted to drugs or alcohol; newborn babies; individuals with AIDS or other wasting illnesses; those recovering from surgery, illness or burns and those on medications that may interfere with the body's use of nutrients.



Whole food supplementation – the way to go!

Traditional or over-the-counter multivitamins are a contrived and false arrangement of nutrients which do not occur in these combinations in nature. There is no "super-fruit" or "super-vegetable" that contains all the nutrients that we require - nature provides for our needs with a variety of different foods. The nutrients that are found in plants act in synergy, and a lot of this value is lost when we try and isolate their active ingredients in the form of a tablet. In addition to this, these high potency, single-nutrient supplements that are so freely available are likely to do more harm than good by disturbing your metabolic balance.

Concentrated Natural Foods

Whole food supplements, like AIM's BarleyLife™ and LeafGreens™, are concentrated natural foods that provide the vitamins, minerals and protein that the body requires. These nutrients are found in the balanced amounts and combinations that are unique to natural foodstuffs.

