

**On Nutrition: by Helayne Waldman, Ed.D., N.E.**

## Is Your Multinutrient Up to Snuff?

Vitamins and minerals are chemicals found in food that are essential to normal human metabolism. Generally, our richest sources of these vital nutrients come from fresh fruits, vegetables and grains, along with wholesome proteins and fats. Unfortunately, by the time these foods get from the farm to your fork, multiple nutrients have already been lost due to soil depletion, shipping, storage, pesticides, and processing. That's where a good multinutrient supplement comes in.

A foundational supplement with good quality essential vitamins and minerals is now considered a must, even among most mainstream scientists. If you're skeptical, just read what Dr. Bruce Ames, Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at UC Berkeley, had to say recently on the issue:

*It is a distortion of priorities for much of the world's population to have an inadequate intake of vitamins or minerals...when a year's supply of a daily multivitamin/mineral pill costs less than a few packs of cigarettes.*

But what does an "adequate intake" actually mean? If you look closely at a bottle of typical vitamins and minerals off the supermarket shelf, you'll see that the label indicates the name of the nutrient, the amount of it in the formulation, and the % DV, or daily value. Daily Values are average levels of nutrients for a person eating 2,000 calories a day. They are based on something called the RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance), which is designed to help consumers use food label information to plan a healthy diet.



Now for the question on the table.

Do average daily values equal optimal intakes for maintaining health and preventing disease? Ay, there's the rub. 60 mg. of Vitamin C is currently considered 100% DV, that is, it is considered sufficient to prevent scurvy, the severe Vitamin C deficiency disease that befell sailors and befuddled doctors until the mid 18<sup>th</sup> Century, when James Lind discovered he could overcome this terrible disease by feeding sailors citrus fruits or lime juice, rich in Vitamin C (thus giving birth to the nickname "limey.")

But is this amount of Vitamin C adequate for smokers, who need at least twice as much as non-smokers, or for those of us who've been exposed to heavy metals, air pollution or other chemicals known to interfere with nutrient function?

You get the idea. Most of us want to use multinutrient that contains a full spectrum of vitamins and minerals in the amounts and forms your body needs to perform at its best – not just enough to prevent a drastic deficiency disease. Any high quality supplement will provide this. My own multinutrient, for example, contains

500 mg. of Vitamin C – enough to prevent scurvy, keep my immune system humming, provide structural integrity to blood vessels and counteract histamine release during an allergic reaction. For these noble purposes, 60 mg just doesn't cut it.

### **Can you get too much of a good thing?**

In the ranges that most vitamins and minerals are available as supplements, they are considered extremely safe. However, there are always exceptions. In general, water-soluble vitamins (C and B vitamins) are excreted when they're not needed. That's why even exceptionally high doses of Vitamin C and the B vitamins are considered non-toxic, as your body will flush out what it doesn't need. A high quality multi will often contain amounts of water-soluble vitamins that are far in excess of DVs, as these vitamins are easily lost through exercise, illness or stress. For example my multi contains 2000% of the Vitamin B12 daily value. One sign of a "high quality" supplement is that its label does *not* read 100% or *less* in every row down the DV column. In my book, that's a sure sign of an "excessively simplified" supplement.

Fat soluble vitamins (A,D,E,K), on the other hand, are stored in body fat, so excessive levels over time could be harmful. Therefore, the %DV of those should be much lower.

There are other cautions worth pointing out. Iron, in excessive amounts, i.e., amounts exceeding the DV, can be quite toxic. In fact, unless you are a pregnant or menstruating woman or a growing child, chances are you don't need additional iron in

the form of supplementation. Be on the lookout for this and don't purchase an iron-containing supplement unless you fall into one of these groups, or have been told you have iron deficiency anemia. And parents, *never* let your children "snack" on candy-flavored multivitamins containing iron. Severe iron poisoning can lead to damage to the intestinal lining, liver failure, nausea, vomiting and shock.

On the other hand, don't confuse toxicity with side effects. High dose niacin, for example, (one of the B vitamins) well known for its "flush" effect can also cause itching, tingling and nausea. Nutritionists and nutritionally oriented physicians will nevertheless use this vitamin therapeutically as an aide to lowering elevated cholesterol levels. Note, however, that use of this or any vitamin at therapeutic levels to treat specific conditions should always be done with the guidance of a healthcare practitioner.

### **Watch out for "junk vitamins"**

Like most things in life, you get what you pay for. Walk into your supermarket or local pharmacy and you'll see shelves of vitamin and mineral supplements. But read the label and you'll discover lots of ingredients in these pills besides vitamins and minerals. A "research" trip to the vitamin aisle in my local supermarket the other day provided me with some specifics. . Here's a smattering of what I found on a typical label, in addition to nutrients and their % DV.

Sorbitol (sugar) \* Fructose (sugar) \* Aspartame (artificial sweetener) \*sodium silicoaluminate (salt) \*Red 40 \*Yellow 6 \*Blue 2 \*Artificial flavor \*butylatedhydroxytoluene (preservative) \*titanium dioxide (pigment)

Get the picture? These substances were neither vitamins nor minerals,

last time I checked. In fact, these sugars, salts, pigments, colors, flavors and preservatives are really there for two reasons: to make the pills look (and taste) more appealing, and to give them a longer shelf life.

But keep in mind always that what's good for the shelf life of a food or vitamin is not likely to enhance your own shelf life! Investing in a pure, balanced, and bioavailable multivitamin (in addition to eating a diet rich in whole foods and low in processed ones) is an incredibly cheap health insurance policy.

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