



Is supplementing necessary?

WHAT'S TRENDING | Paula Hendricks

If you have been trying to improve your health, lose some weight or ward off illnesses, you have probably asked yourself, “Is supplementing really necessary to achieve these goals?”

My answer is yes.

I believe supplementing can be an important addition to your daily regime, but with caution.

So where do you start?

The first step is to review your overall diet. Most supplements can be found in fresh vegetables, fruits, lean meats, fish and fats. However, the typical American foods are often poor in quality, consisting of highly processed grains and added sugars. Many are also lacking in necessary vitamins and minerals, which can lead to poor health, obesity and disease over time.

Supplementing should be a preventative approach to maintaining and improving your health long-term. Even if we eat a nutrient-rich diet, our ability to utilize them diminishes over time. But don't just take my word for it. According to Harvard-affiliated Brigham and Women's Hospital epidemiologist, Dr. Howard Sesso, “As we get older, our ability to absorb nutrients from food decreases. Also, our energy needs aren't the same, and we tend to eat less.”

So what should you be taking? Top health experts recommend daily multivitamins for nearly everyone. Dr. Sesso puts it this way: “Look for a multivitamin with D and B vitamins (especially folate),

iron, magnesium, and calcium and go for a well-known brand that's been around for a long time and is likely well tested.”

Unfortunately, there is an overwhelming array of supplements on the market today and it can be quite confusing, choosing the good from the gimmicky. I'm talking about those infomercials on TV late at night promising you'll wake up the next morning 20 pounds lighter and wrinkle-free. Not everyone needs to take a fat burner, sleep aids or hormone supplements, but there are some basic vitamins and minerals that can help reduce disease over time: If you are diabetic or pre-diabetic, there are supplements that will help improve blood sugar regulation, such as chromium and alpha lipoic acid; if you have heart disease, there are supplements to improve cardiac health such as CoQ10 and vitamin D. Don't like fish or worried about mercury levels? Adding a high-quality Omega-3 fatty acid is probably a good idea. If there is a family history of osteoporosis, or if you have been recently diagnosed with osteopenia, vitamins D and K coupled with calcium and magnesium can help.

Just don't be taken in by the gimmicky supplements currently on the market. Nothing is going to get rid of your stomach fat or grow your hair back by next week. You could also do yourself some harm. Over-supplementing can interfere with your health, too. There is that old saying — too much of a good thing.

I recommend consulting with your physician or a nutritionist to review your health needs and goals who can provide you with supplement recommendations. Some blood testing may also be suggested to determine your specific needs. Take care of your body today so it will take care of you tomorrow.

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