

FIT 4 LIFE



Do we need vitamin supplements?

This question came to Wellness Coordinator Caroline Smith on one of the surveys and here's her response:

Vitamins are organic (carbon containing) molecules necessary for the growth and maintenance of life that must be provided from the foods we eat. The exception to this is Vitamin D which is activated in the skin by sun exposure.

Vitamins themselves do not have calories that can be used for energy. The main purpose of vitamins is to speed up the body's chemical reactions which help us use our food sources as energy. They also facilitate the reactions that lead to repair and other processes essential to life.

The absence of a vitamin will prevent the completion of the reaction and often result in tissue damage. It is often difficult to pinpoint the specific vitamin which is low in the body as so many of them work together. The idea behind a vitamin supplement is to replace what the body is not getting.

The most important way to obtain the necessary vitamins is to eat a wide variety of foods. The large scope of vitamins can be provided by eating a variety of foods: fruits,

vegetables, breads, pastas, grains, legumes, dairy, fish, meat, poultry and eggs.

There is one variety of vitamins we may not be getting enough of — antioxidants. The combination of vitamins A, E, C and the mineral selenium help fight free radicals, which are scavengers on the body. We obtain a majority of these vitamins from our fruits and vegetables. Due to a high need for these foods, the stores are trying to obtain them quicker and quicker. They are being picked before they are completely ripened, and therefore have only the quantity of vitamins that are available at picking time.

If your diet is not high in fruits and vegetables, it might be beneficial to supplement your diet with an antioxidant combination. There are a number of good ones on the market. Many of the vitamins will list that they have antioxidants in them.

The only problem with taking them in a pill that has all the other vitamins and minerals is that you might be getting vitamins that you do not need. Most vitamin supplements will list what percent of the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) they meet. Do not purchase a pill that has more than about one third of the RDA because the diet will provide a good portion of your

need.

Vitamins B and C are water soluble and can be carried throughout the body and absorbed by the cells where they are needed. Since they are water soluble they do not store in the body, and you need to replenish them every day.

The way to regulate whether or not you are getting an excessive amount of water soluble vitamins is by the color of your urine. It should be copious or clear if you are well hydrated and using a majority of the vitamins.

The fat soluble vitamins A, D, E and K concentrate in fatty tissues and cell membranes. Since they *can* be stored, they can become toxic, causing potential problems for some individuals.

Since everyone has different needs, it is not possible to make a general statement that a vitamin supplement is or is not appropriate to take. Hopefully, by reading this article, you will see that it is important to have them, and preferably obtain them from eating a wide variety of foods.

Consult the chart below for some of the functions and food sources of the vitamins listed.

B-1 (thiamine)	Needed for carbohydrate digestion, growth in children, & maint. of organ muscle tone.	Wheat germ, bran, whole grains, blackstrap molasses, nutritional yeast
B-2 (Riboflavin)	Necessary for cell respiration, food metabolism, maint. of healthy eyes, skin and mouth.	Liver, tongue, organ meats, egg yolks, milk, cheese, wheat germ
B-3 (Niacin)	Aids digestion, dilates blood vessels, improves circulation, reduces cholesterol in blood. Needed for healthy skin.	Lean meats, poultry, fish, peanuts, wheat germ, nutritional yeast
B-6 (Pyridoxine)	Needed for production of antibodies & red blood cells, aids digestion.	Bananas, wheat germ, leafy greens, raw meats, milk
B-12 (Cyanocobalamin)	Construction/regeneration of red blood cells, food metabolism, healthy nervous system.	Liver, meat, fish, milk, eggs, yogurt, wheat germ
B-15 (Pangamic Acid)	Promotes cell respiration, antioxidant, regulates fat & sugar metabolism.	Nutritional yeast, brown rice, whole grains, pumpkin and sesame seeds
C	Helps prevent infections, strengthens connective tissues, healthy teeth, gums, & bones.	Citrus fruits, tomatoes, green peppers, strawberries, kale, broccoli, most fresh fruits & vegetables
A	Ensures normal structure & function of cell membranes, acts to fight infection.	Eggs, liver, dairy products, carrots, green leafy veggies, colored fruits & veggies.