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Vitamins and Dietary Supplements: What is the Difference?

(COLUMBUS, Ohio)— It is no secret that proper vitamin intake plays a key role in disease prevention, but what about other dietary supplements?

Before deciding whether extra vitamins or dietary supplements will add benefit to your health, it is helpful to know the difference between the options readily available at your local supermarket or health food store.

“Vitamins and minerals are essential nutrients the body cannot make which must be provided from external sources. Some are water soluble and some are fat soluble,” said Pat Jonas, M.D., a Dayton-area family physician. “Supplements are not vitamins or minerals; some are grown as herbs and some are artificially manufactured.”

Vitamins are essential for the many processes in the body; they help the body use carbohydrates, fats and proteins for repairs. Minerals are essential components to bones and teeth; they help to maintain the balance of fluids in the body. The best way to ensure that you are getting enough vitamins and minerals is through a healthy and well-rounded diet. Supplements are generally herbal or artificial substances that are marketed as having positive effects on certain health conditions. In many cases, there is little to no conclusive evidence that herbal or artificially manufactured supplements have any affect on health conditions.

According to Jonas, a 2002 article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) recommended that all Americans supplement their nutrition with a multivitamin/multimineral due to the declining quality of the food supply. The minimum amount of each element in these products is identified as the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA), or the amount each person needs to prevent disease. Jonas recommends that everyone should consider taking a multivitamin/multimineral to make sure their vitamin intake not only prevents disease, but also supports good health.

“With the massive growth in the use of vitamins, supplements and herbal products, physicians have to be more aware of possible interactions with prescription drugs. For example, Ginkgo biloba, vitamin E and fish oil may all thin the blood and interfere with prescription blood thinners,” said Jonas. “Vitamin C can worsen an iron storage disorder called hemochromatosis.”

2.2.2. Vitamins and Dietary Supplements

People who cannot eat dairy products might consider taking a calcium and magnesium supplement. If you are a vegetarian, vitamin B12 may be lacking from your diet as the body usually absorbs it from animal products. Pregnant women should also consider taking vitamin supplements. Anyone on a weight-loss plan who consumes less than 1,200 calories a day or anyone with food allergies might consider adding a multivitamin to their diet.

As for supplements, Glucosamine Chondroitin may decrease the pain of osteoarthritis while expanding the affected joint space. Omega three fish oil is known to lower triglycerides and blood pressure and raise good cholesterol levels (HDL). According to Jonas, a German study found that Ginkgo biloba, initially thought to aid in concentration, was proven to help with peripheral circulation.

Jonas said that one of the challenges that supplements present is the lack of oversight in the manufacturing process. While food products and pharmaceuticals are bound by regulations set forth by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the vitamin and supplement industry has no similar standards. Jonas recommends making sure to read the ingredients and disclaimers on all bottles of vitamins and dietary supplements so there is no misconception on what benefit the product is claiming to provide.

“Patients with chronic health conditions should always seek the advice of their physician before using vitamins or dietary supplements as part of their treatment,” said Jonas. People who are diagnosed with conditions such as chronic blood clotting, cancer, diabetes, liver and thyroid problems, high blood pressure, and heart disease should discuss taking any dietary supplements with their physician first. You should also discuss dietary supplements with your physician if you are taking any prescription drugs.

“The nutraceutical revolution will impact everyone. Work with your family physician to make the most of it,” said Jonas.

The Ohio Academy of Family Physicians is a statewide professional association with more than 4,400 members, including practicing physicians, family medicine residents and medical students. The scope of family medicine encompasses all ages, both sexes and every disease entity. Family physicians provide comprehensive, continuing care to all members of the family.

FACT SHEET

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You should consider a multivitamin if:

- You are on a weight-loss plan
- Your nutrition is not well balanced
- Your diet is lacking recommended nutrients
- You eat less than 1,200 calories a day
- You are pregnant
- You cannot eat dairy products
- Your diet does not consist of the RDA of vitamins and minerals through diet

Talk to your doctor before taking dietary supplements if:

- You have a chronic health condition
- You are taking any prescription medication
- You are considering adding dietary supplements to your diet

When purchasing vitamins, minerals and other dietary supplements:

- Read the label carefully to determine ingredients, proper dosage and conditions the supplement is meant for.
- Remember that the best way to ensure you are getting the right amount of vitamins and minerals is through a healthy, well-rounded diet.

Sources: www.familydoctor.org
www.mayoclinic.org