

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Vitamin Supplements and You

Almost every day we hear a new study touting the benefits of a vitamin or mineral that supposedly has the power to help prevent or cure an illness. We all want to do what’s best for our health, but are vitamin supplements really necessary? And if so, which ones are worth the hefty price tag?

The truth is, eating high-quality food in appropriate quantities remains the best way to meet a normal, healthy body's vitamin and mineral needs. However, there are certain stages in life, such as pregnancy or after menopause, when it can be difficult to meet extra needs through diet alone. At these times, supplements are often recommended—your doctor is the best person to advise you on this.

Who Might Need Supplements?

- Women who may become pregnant, are pregnant or are breastfeeding
- Some infants
- People who omit entire food groups from their diets
- People on very low-calorie diets
- Some women after menopause
- People suffering from some medical conditions

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Remember, however, that too much of certain nutrients can be dangerous—ask your doctor or a registered dietician for guidelines.

Children and Supplements

Almost all commercial infant formulas contain vitamin supplements. Breast milk contains adequate amounts of all vitamins except vitamin D, which is sometimes supplemented. Babies over nine months who are on cow's milk instead of formula may need vitamin C supplements until they begin eating fruits and vegetables.

It’s important to keep vitamins, along with other medications, locked away from children. An overdose of vitamins A, D, E or K can be lethal.

Choosing the Best Supplement for You

Unless you’ve been prescribed a vitamin or supplement for specific medical condition, chose a multi-vitamin with 100 per cent of the recommended daily values. This will provide a safe and adequate balance of vitamins.

Other things to keep in mind:

- Look for store brands. These are likely to be of very comparable quality to name brands, but much lower in price.
- Find the product that works best for you. Some supplements may cause stomach upset, constipation or nausea.
- Taking a supplement with or after meals optimizes absorption. Vitamins tend to work alongside other nutrients.
- If you are taking other medications, check whether they can be taken at the same time. Some medications are affected by calcium, for example, and should be taken an hour or two before or after supplements. Check with your pharmacist.

While popping a vitamin supplement is no replacement for good nutrition through diet—and doesn’t taste nearly as good—vitamins can be beneficial to some people at some times. For more information on what’s best for you, talk to your pharmacist or your family doctor.