

An Apple a Day?

Friday, July 30, 2010



Health Matters

By Kerry Sauser

An apple a day keeps the doctor away. Don't we wish it was that easy! Although keeping our bodies well may not be quite that simple, the old saying still conveys a sound nutritional concept—and one that I am asked about regularly. "Do I really need to take a daily vitamin supplement to be healthy?"

It's a very good, very important question. Most people today understand that our bodies require specific nutrients, minerals and other elements to function properly. Just like a car short of oil or fluids, if we are missing any of these vital ingredients, our bodies will "break down" and stop operating properly. Remember the old time British sailors who developed scurvy due to a lack of Vitamin C in their food while on extended ocean voyages? Improper nutrition so affected the Royal Navy that it ultimately carried citrus aboard its ships and required sailors to eat a lemon or lime a day so they would get enough Vitamin C to stay fit and able to work. (Hence the nickname "Limey" for a British sailor.) The U.S. government has considered nutrition of vital importance for well over half a century. During World War II, a committee (that later became the Food and Drug Administration) investigated issues of nutrition that might "affect national defense". The committee established Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA's) to help our government develop food kits for the military and guidelines for civilian food rationing. A revised version of the RDA is still a factor in food labeling.

These days, nutrition has become a real science. To give you an idea, the National Academy of Sciences, which advises the government on nutrition, has specific daily intake recommendations (DRI) for 14 vitamins, 15 elements (minerals), 11 micronutrients and caloric intake. In addition, the DRI are broken down into 3 different categories that are applied to 22 different groups based on age and sex (www.nutrition.gov). Experts indicate that nutrient needs even vary from person to person. In addition, much current research indicates that we may benefit from nutritional components besides those des-

igned by government guidelines. Suffice to say, it's complicated.

It's also important to note that a person can overdose on certain nutrients. An apple a day is good, but eating a bushel a day has a very negative outcome! The same holds true with supplements. Vitamin A, for instance, is crucial for maintaining good vision and the immune system, but too much can cause dizziness, osteoporosis or liver damage.

The complexity of the nutrient issue is compounded by the fact that sources of nutrients vary in quantity and availability. Think of that apple again. Pick one from a tree in your own backyard and eat it minutes later. If it was grown chemical-free, in rich soil and with pure water, chances are it will have significantly more nutrients than an apple commercially farmed in South America, sprayed with pesticides, transported thousands of miles, and stored for 5 months before reaching the grocery store. Many factors, including what we eat, how we eat, the quality of our food, and even our general health can make getting proper nutrition a real guessing game.

How can you really know how much and what type of nutrients you do need? If you are in good health you might be inclined to follow the "insurance policy" method and take a good all-purpose supplement to cover possible gaps in your nutrition without really knowing exactly what you need. If you have health concerns or want to accurately determine your individual nutrient needs, nutritional testing will provide specific information.

Nutritional testing normally involves either a blood or urine test to determine actual nutrient levels in your body. The more complex tests sometimes require saliva or stool samples as well. One of the most common is a simple blood test to check a single component, Vitamin D. In comparison, one of the more complex tests checks 42 different components, including some that indicate your body's ability to absorb nutrients. Testing allows for very specific nutritional and dietary evaluation; your diet (and supplements) can then target exactly the nutrients you need.

Once you have established your nutritional requirements, how do you meet them? That raises two other common questions. "Do I need supplements if I eat a healthy diet?" and "Is there a difference in vitamins?"

"Do I need supplements if I eat healthy?" Can we talk? Are you

really eating at least 9 servings of fruits and vegetables every day? Do you—like millions of other Americans—sometimes eat on the run? And even if you eat well most of the time, remember that tasty apple you picked in your own backyard? Today it has perhaps 20% fewer nutrients than one your grandmother picked in her backyard due to soil and environmental changes. In all cases, a supplement can help make certain you cover the bases nutritionally.

The second question, then,—*"Is there a difference in supplements?"* Unequivocally, YES! Generally speaking, consumers can choose between whole food and synthetic "lab" vitamins (actually termed isolated fractured vitamins). In food, vitamins do not occur as the isolated chemical compounds found in synthetic supplements. Rather, vitamins are accompanied by numerous "facilitators" (phyto-nutrients, enzymes, co-enzymes, co-factors) that help the body absorb them. For instance, the synthetic form of Vitamin C is usually ascorbic acid. In foods however, Ascorbic Acid is only one of many components of Vitamin C. Food-source Vitamin C also contains Rutin, Bioflavonoids (vitamin P), Factor K, Factor J, Factor P, and organic copper. So you can see, a lot can be missing in a synthetic. Synthetic vitamins may even pull the facilitator compounds from your body during synthesis, and as a result can actually deplete the body of nutrients.

Other synthetics are simply not in a form your body can easily process (i.e. they have low bio-availability). Whole food vitamins run none of these risks and they greatly reduce the chance of overdose.

Make sure your supplements are created by a reputable manufacturer.

Temperature, humidity, air pressure and cleanliness all affect potency. Some manufacturers maintain higher product testing standards than others; this assures that you get a consistent dosage and the highest quality possible.

Nutrition may do more than just maintain your health. Exciting research is pointing to the significant role it plays in counteracting some cardiovascular and auto-immune diseases. Even behavioral illnesses such as ADD and depression have shown promising improvement with nutritional therapy. Seek the advice of a professional to safely explore such options.

To assure tip top nutrition, keep the following in mind:

1. Base your nutrition on a healthy diet containing plenty of fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Eat fresh, organic foods whenever possible.

2. Take "whole food" supplements that include complete nutritional components to further support your diet.

3. If you have health issues or want to fine tune your supplementation, use nutritional testing to accurately assess your unique needs.

In the end, an apple a day may not keep the doctor away, but adding a quality, whole food supplement to a healthy diet and lifestyle may help you achieve that goal.

Until next month... Heal well, Be well...naturally!

K.S.