

Family Living Focus

Beaver Co.
Extension Agent

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trients. A good example of this is iron, which is a common nutrient deficiency for children and menstruating women. Iron supplements should be taken with a meal or a glass of juice since the acid produced in the stomach as a result of food entering it or the acid naturally occurring in juice increases the absorption of iron into the bloodstream.

It's best to avoid drinking coffee or tea for at least 90 minutes after taking an iron pill or eating an iron-rich meal. Chemicals called polyphenols in coffee and tannins in tea have been found to decrease the absorption of iron. Since calcium may reduce iron absorption, avoid taking a multi-vitamin/mineral supplement at the same time as a separate calcium pill. Instead, take them with different meals.

What Is The Best Calcium Supplement

For those taking a calcium supplement, select one with calcium carbonate, since it is best absorbed when taken with meals. Because the body is not able to absorb large doses as well as it does small doses of calcium, it's a good idea to divide large doses (1,000 to 1,200 milligrams per day) into three smaller doses throughout the day. In addition, if you are not receiving enough sunlight on your skin, you may

not be producing enough vitamin D, which is crucial in the absorption of calcium.

This is especially a concern for those living in the northeastern part of the U.S. and those who are home-bound. Those who don't expose themselves to the sun should purchase a calcium supplement that contains 200 to 400 milligrams of vitamin D for every 1,000 milligrams of calcium.

How Are Seniors' Needs Different

An estimated 20 percent of people older than 60 and 40 percent of people older than 80 have atrophic gastritis, a disorder in which acid is not sufficiently produced in the stomach. This can lead to inadequate absorption of those minerals that require acid to be present in the stomach.

For those older than 60 years, to maximize the absorption of a mineral such as calcium, take the supplement with meals. Or purchase calcium citrate supplements, which are better absorbed by those with atrophic gastritis. Be aware that calcium citrate pills have less calcium per pill; therefore, you will need to take more pills, which may result in more expense.

Those with atrophic gastritis may also have difficulty absorbing vitamin B12, a nutrient important in the formation of red blood cells. For those older than 50, it's recommended to take a supplement containing two to four micrograms of vitamin B12 per day or to eat vitamin B12 fortified cereal daily. The vitamin B12 found in supplements can be absorbed whether stomach acid is present or not.

How Effective Are The More Expensive Supplements?
They're not! While timed release capsules are more expensive, they are not necessarily bet-

ter. Those advertising timed release supplements promote the importance of maintaining a constant level of vitamins and minerals in the bloodstream. Since this is not important, as it is for medications such as antibiotics, don't spend the extra money for timed release.

When searching through the shelves for a vitamin/mineral supplement, simply look for one with a USP symbol and one that contains no more than 100 percent of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) for all vitamins and minerals.

The presence of the USP symbol indicates the product has been tested to disintegrate and dissolve so it can be easily absorbed. It also means that the purity and potency meet established standards.

Vitamins C And E — Natural Or Synthetic?

Spending extra money on the natural form of vitamin C is not necessary. On the other hand, research has revealed that the natural form of vitamin E (d-alpha tocopherol) is better absorbed. In fact, the natural form has been found to be twice as strong as the synthetic (laboratory made) form (dl-alpha tocopherol).

Research indicates that 100 to 400 International Units (I.U.) per day can help fight heart disease and enhance your immune system.

So purchasing and taking a vitamin/mineral supplement is not as easy as it once seemed. However, research in this area has led to interesting information, which will help you to get the most from your supplement and your dollar.

Resource: Tufts University Health and Nutrition Letter, March 1999, "When (and How) to Take Your Vitamin and Mineral Supplements."

THE WHAT'S AND HOW'S OF VITAMIN AND MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS

Many of us take a calcium supplement to help prevent osteoporosis, vitamin E to help protect against heart disease, or a multi-vitamin/mineral pill to take the place of a diet that is not as healthy as we'd like it to be.

When taking one or more supplements a day, you may want to think about how to get the most for your dollar. In order to gain the maximum benefit from vitamin and mineral supplements, you need to consider many factors. These include how to improve the absorption of supplements, should they be taken with or without food, and

are capsules that promise better absorption worth the extra money?

What Affects Absorption Of Vitamins And Minerals

If you take a multi-vitamin/mineral formula, it will be better absorbed if you take it with a meal. This occurs because the stomach breaks down the pill while it digests food, making it easier to absorb the various nutrients in the pill into the bloodstream. Taking pills with a meal can also help reduce the gastric (stomach) discomfort that some people experience when taking supplements.

Keep in mind that taking vitamin and mineral supplements with certain foods can increase or decrease the absorption of nu-

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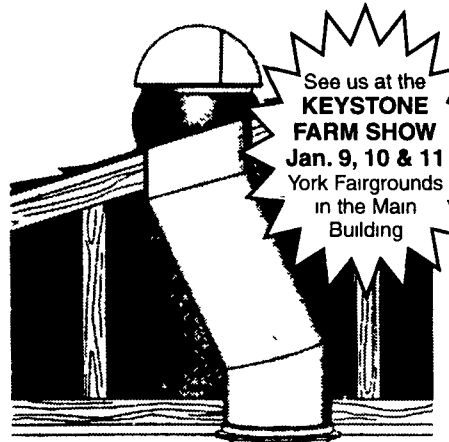
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