

THE FACTS ABOUT MULTIVITAMINS

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It's estimated that 82 per cent of Canadian households use nutritional supplements, and among them, two-thirds take a multivitamin every day. The primary reasons cited for taking a daily multivitamin included: to enhance energy and well-being; to help defend against degenerative diseases such as cancer, heart disease, osteoporosis and dementia; to help manage existing health conditions such as arthritis and diabetes; and to slow the aging process. Learn more about the facts regarding multivitamins and how you can properly choose a multivitamin that can play a positive role in your overall health.

Scientific evidence suggests that there may be a number of good reasons to take a multivitamin product each day. Population studies reveal that 80-91 per cent of people do not achieve the recommended intake levels (RDA) for all vitamins and minerals each day from food. People at risk for missing out on RDA include those who diet, individuals with poor eating habits, those who are ill, the elderly, and individuals under stress. Supplemental levels of certain vitamins and minerals (beyond which food alone can provide) are linked to the prevention of many degenerative diseases and a slowing of the aging process.

After reviewing studies conducted from 1996 to 2002, the authors in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* concluded that all adults might benefit from a multivitamin supplement. The *New England Journal of Medicine* recently concluded that while proof of the benefits of multivitamins is still far from certain, the few dollars you spend on them is probably a good investment in your health. These facts have contributed to the increased use of multivitamin supplements by the general public. However, knowing what to look for in a multivitamin is crucial in terms of deriving the best available benefits. Below are the features you should look for in a multivitamin product to ensure that you get the protection and benefits you deserve.



A desirable multivitamin product should contain anti-oxidants at the following levels: vitamin C (500-1,000 mg), vitamin E (200-400 IU, natural source), beta-carotene (7,500-15,000 IU), selenium (100-200 mcg), vitamin A (2,000-3,000 IU), and vitamin D (400 IU). These recommendations stem from the understanding that anti-oxidants help protect the body from harmful free radicals. Free radicals damage the DNA in the tissues of our body, which can cause accelerated aging, decreased immunity, inflammation, and cancer. Unfortunately, most multivitamins in the marketplace do not contain adequate anti-oxidant levels, forcing consumers to purchase additional supplements.

Some multivitamin brands contain the full complement of vitamins but only a few minerals. Minerals are needed for many important biological processes in the body such as the formation of blood and bone, energy production, nerve and muscle function, growth and healing. A multivitamin should offer zinc (15 mg), iron (6 mg), copper (1-2 mg) and chromium (50 mcg), along with calcium and

magnesium. Keep in mind that a multivitamin with minerals will not provide the full RDA for calcium and magnesium simply because these nutrients are too large to pack into a supplement. If more of these two nutrients are required, a separate supplement is needed.

A well-designed multivitamin supplement should also provide a full complement of B-vitamins as a B-50 complex. Enhanced B-vitamin status has been shown to help reduce the risk of heart disease, reduce certain inflammatory states, improve detoxification, and maintain brain and cognitive function as we age. Known for their anti-stress and anti-fatigue properties, a B-50 complex is an important element of a high-grade multivitamin formulation. Be sure your multivitamin contains at least 50 mg each of vitamins B1, B2, B3, B6, and pantothenic acid, as well as 50 mcg of B12. Folic acid and biotin round out the other B-vitamins that should be present. Therefore, a multivitamin product that is anti-oxidant enriched, contains the necessary minerals and a B-50 complex, can help defend your body against degenerative conditions, strengthen the immune system, slow the biological processes of aging, and enhance your daily energy level. You should be able to achieve all this at a cost of no more than \$1.00 to \$1.25 per day.

There are several other factors to consider when choosing a multivitamin. Always check the expiry date to make sure it's at least three months away from date of purchase. It is usually better to choose a multivitamin that can be taken in divided doses. It is very difficult for your body to absorb all required nutrients in just one dose. Divided doses allow for better absorption, and also allow you to alter your nutrient requirements if needed. Minerals listed as "chelate" or "citrate" tend to be easier to absorb. Avoid multivitamins that contain artificial preservatives, colorings, additives, flavorings, or stabilizers. Hypoallergenic formulations that are free of any sugar, corn, starch, milk products, wheat or yeast ensure that the multivitamin supplement will be well tolerated. Special precautions should be taken by those who are pregnant or breast feeding, and in those individuals who have a kidney disorder or condition.

Multivitamin supplements will not make up for a diet that is high in fat and lacking in fruits, vegetables and fiber. Instead, multivitamins serve to act as insurance against times of poor dietary habits, illness, aging, and stress. They also serve to supplement our bodies with nutrients at therapeutic doses to combat the effects of age and disease.

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