

## **Dietary supplements: Use and Abuse**

**Author: Stepan Ludmila  
Ling. cons: L. Prozor-Barbalat**

*Every day we want to look well trying a lot of ways to achieve it. A dietary supplement is one of this way that would help us. In some cases it gives good results, in others doesn't. So my speech is about use and abuse of the dietary supplements.*

A dietary supplement, also known as food or nutritional supplement, is a preparation intended to provide nutrients, such as vitamins, minerals, fatty acids or amino acids that are missing or are not consumed in sufficient quantity in a person's diet. Some countries define dietary supplements as foods, while in others they are defined as drugs. Dietary supplements include a broad range of products, whether in tablet, capsule or liquid form. By law, these products must be labeled as dietary supplements.

People take dietary supplements for many reasons, sometimes medically valid, sometimes not. In low or appropriate dosages, supplements can be beneficial for some people. However, other people may take supplements as a so-called easy road to health – a way that appears easier than making wise food choices [1].

If you are healthy, you can get the vitamins and minerals you need from carefully – selected food choices alone. Supplements usually aren't necessary – not for most healthy people if they are able and willing to eat a balanced and varied diet. For some healthy people – under some circumstances – multivitamin/ mineral supplements do offer benefits. For example women who are pregnant or breast – feeding need more of some nutrients, esp. iron, fotalc and calcium. Their doctor may recommend a dietary supplement to ensure they get adequate amounts [2].

Some vegetarians may need extra calcium, iron, zinc and vitamins B<sub>12</sub> and D – if their regular eating pattern doesn't supply much meat, dairy and other animal product.

Consumed in excessive amounts, some supplements may have undesirable effects, such as fatigue, diarrhea and hair loss. For others, the side effects may be more serious: kidney stones, liver or nerve damage, birth defects or even death [1].

Because fat-soluble vitamins are stored in the body, taking high levels of some for a prolonged time can be toxic or poisonous or lethal. For example, excess amounts of vitamin D can cause kidney damage and bone deformity. An excess amounts of vitamin A, taken over time, can cause bone and liver damage, headaches, diarrhea and birth defects. Water-soluble vitamin and mineral supplements also can be risky if taken in excess. Being water-soluble, many women have viewed large doses of vitamin B<sub>6</sub> as harmless. Instead large doses may cause irreversible nerve damage. As another example, very high doses of vitamin C can cause diarrhea, kidney damage and bladder problems. Excessive amounts of folic acid can hide the symptoms of pernicious anemia, so the disease gets worse without being detected [2].

Low levels of dietary supplements may contribute to excess intakes or dietary imbalances for some people. High levels of calcium intake may interfere with normal iron absorption. And zinc supplements can decrease levels of “good” cholesterol.

Anyone who is unable or unwilling, regularly to consume a healthy diet probably should take a dietary supplement, but the way that large doses from dietary supplements affect the body depends on many factors. Body size, supplement dose, and how long it’s taken, all influence whether or not the supplement will be toxic for you. So, to be convinced of your health, first of all of what you are going to do, consult your doctor.

### **Bibliography:**

1. Duyff R. L., *Foods & Nutrition Guide*, The American Dietetic Association’s, MS, RP, CFCS, 1998.
2. Mehas K., Sharon R., *Food Science and you*, USA, 1989.
3. Internet: [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)