

Should I take a multivitamin supplement?

Yes, but consult with a registered dietician first.



1. It is important to remember that over the last century both farming methods and storage practices have changed dramatically. (The exception is organic produce, but these foods tend to be less easily available and more expensive.)
The move to intensive/ factory farming methods has resulted in foods having a lower nutritional value. In other words, the food we eat is not as nutritious as that eaten by our grandparents and great-grandparents.
2. Furthermore, modern lifestyles are characterised by stress, too little exercise and unhealthy diets, all of which can affect the way that the body absorbs and uses vitamins and minerals. One way to address this two-fold problem is to increase one's vitamin and mineral intake.

Supplements are designed to fill the gap between what we need and what we get from the food we eat

Is there scientific evidence to support the idea that taking a supplement is beneficial?

Yes. There is a large body of scientific evidence that shows the benefits of taking a daily multivitamin. Recently, for example, an article written by a group of highly respected cardiologists entitled "Eat Right AND Take a Multivitamin" appeared in the New England Journal of Medicine.

Many articles have argued that the best way of getting all the required nutrients is from actual food and through a healthy eating plan. However, they also present the view that taking supplements is a health benefit since it applies the principle of synergy. (Synergy means combined or coordinated action.) In other words, since almost all nutrients depend on other nutrients to work properly, a multivitamin supplement can help the body acquire and use vitamins and minerals more effectively. It is important to note that it is not recommended that one takes individual nutrients on their own - with one or two specific exceptions, for example, taking a short-term course of vitamin C to fight specific infections or a vitamin B and iron supplement for anemia.

What is the Recommended Dietary Allowance?

The World Health Organisation has identified the minimum quantities of vitamins and minerals that a typical individual requires in order to prevent deficiency diseases such as scurvy (vitamin C), beri-beri (vitamin B1) and pellagra (B3 niacin). These minimum quantities are referred to as the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA). However, in order to ensure optimal health, scientific research suggests that a typically active man or woman needs higher doses of minerals and vitamins than the minimum RDA levels.

Interestingly, these 'minimum quantities' have increased over the years. In the case of vitamin C, for example, it was originally believed that 30mg of vitamin C per day was sufficient to maintain good health. This figure has now increased to 60mg per day (in the UK) and 85mg per day (in the US).

Multivitamin supplements: some important points to consider...

- ✓ Don't self diagnose: consult a registered dietician
- ✓ Don't mega dose with a single-nutrient supplements, rather choose a multi-vitamin and multi-mineral supplement
- ✓ Stick with a reputable manufacturer/well-known brand
- ✓ Take responsibility for your own health. Find out if any claims made by a product are backed up by credible scientific research
- ✓ Continually reassess your need to take supplements





References/resources:

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