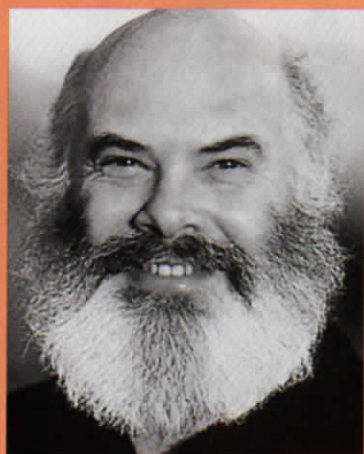


Reported by Rachel Rabkin



Andrew Weil, M.D., a pioneer in the field of integrative medicine, is the author of the best-selling *8 Weeks to Optimum Health* (to order, call 800-266-5766, dept 1630).

confused about supplements?

Dr. Weil answers your most-asked questions about vitamins and minerals.

I eat well, so I don't need supplements, right? Even someone who maintains a healthful diet rich in fruits and vegetables can benefit from supplemental vitamins and minerals. Bioengineering, farming techniques, and cooking may rob

plants of nutrients and antioxidants, so using supplements can bolster your immune system and reduce your risk of heart disease, cancer, and stroke.

Can I take a multi to cover my needs? I recommend taking vitamins in

What if I can't afford to buy all the supplements I "need"?

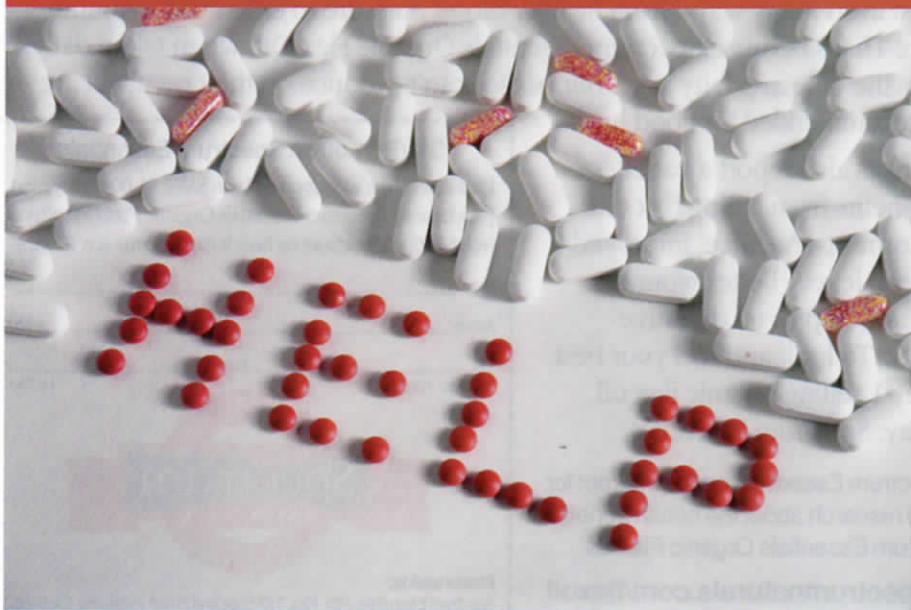
Expensive vitamins are likely to be of greater benefit to the manufacturer than to you. Buy the cheapest available brands that contain the least fillers and additives. As for the basics, here's my antioxidant "cocktail," a daily formula that won't cost too much money:

● **Vitamin C** (1,000 milligrams), two to three times a day, with meals. Plain ascorbic acid may irritate a sensitive stomach, so take C with food or look for a buffered or nonacidic soluble-powder form, which is more easily absorbed by your body than a large tablet is.

● **Vitamin E** (400 to 800 IU). People under 40 should take 400 IU a day; those 40 and up, 800 IU. Since vitamin E is fat-soluble, it must be taken with food to be absorbed. Use a natural form containing mixed tocopherols.

● **Selenium** (200 to 300 micrograms). This trace mineral has significant anticancer properties. Selenium and vitamin E facilitate one another's absorption, so take them together; vitamin C may interfere with the absorption of some forms of selenium, so take them separately. And beware: Daily doses of selenium above 400 micrograms may be toxic, causing such problems as nausea, fatigue, diarrhea, and hair and nail damage.

● **Mixed carotenes** (25,000 IU). I take mine with breakfast. Men: Look for a product that contains lycopene, the red pigment in tomatoes that helps prevent prostate cancer.



stages throughout the day, but it's also okay to get your daily requirement in one capsule, pill, or tablet. Some precautions: Check doses to make sure your brand contains enough antioxidants (see box on page 44), and be aware that you can get *too much* of certain things in a multivitamin. For example, more than 400 micrograms of folic acid daily can mask the signs of a vitamin-B₁₂ deficiency in your body. And, contrary to popular belief, iron deficiency is not a widespread problem. Most of us get plenty of iron in our diets (women of menstruating age are the exception and should check with their doctors), and an excess may promote cancer, heart disease, and iron-overload disease. So pass on multivitamins with iron unless medical tests have indicated that you need it.

Some say C's a lifesaver; others, that it can kill you. Who's right? Since a British study appeared in the April 9, 1998, issue of *Nature* claiming that daily doses of 500 milligrams and up may cause cell damage, I've been flooded with questions about vitamin C. According to Professor Balz Frei, the director of the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University, the study is seriously flawed and its findings have little validity. It directly contradicts other studies

harmful if they build up in the body, but actual toxicity is extremely uncommon.

Can I OD on vitamins? As I mentioned in the previous question, the fat-soluble vitamins A and D may pose a health hazard if taken in very high doses. Limit vitamin A to 50,000 IU a day and vitamin D to 800 IU. Even some of the water-soluble vitamins can bring on problems; for example, more than 200 milligrams of B₆ daily may cause nerve damage. Once you've assessed which supplements you really need, remember that when it comes to dosage, less can be more.

Should I go natural when it comes to vitamins? There is no significant difference between most natural and synthetic vitamins. The exception is vitamin E, which works better in the natural form (d-alpha-tocopherol) than in the synthetic (dl-alpha-tocopherol). Take a natural E that contains mixed tocopherols. Don't be fooled by labels claiming "with d-alpha": Chances are you'll get a small amount of the natural vitamin mixed with lots of the synthetic.

Are vitamins best taken with food? Some supplements need sufficient acid in the stomach to be absorbed; others—like fat-soluble vitamins—can't be absorbed unless you take them with a meal that con-

The bottom line: "Buy the cheapest available brands that contain the least fillers and additives."

and doesn't focus on the *overall* value of vitamin C, which boosts the immune system and helps reduce the risk of cancer and cardiovascular diseases. Excluding individuals with hemochromatosis (iron overload), I've never seen anyone react adversely to megadoses of C, save some flatulence and diarrhea.

What's the skinny on fat-soluble and water-soluble vitamins? Vitamins fall into two general categories: those that are soluble in water and thus easily eliminated from the body (B-complex and C), and those that are fat-soluble and can accumulate in the system (A, D, E, and K). The latter are potentially

harmful if they build up in the body, but actual toxicity is extremely uncommon. As a rule, take vitamins with or after a meal. Ingesting pills and powders on an empty stomach greatly increases your chances of experiencing nausea, heartburn, and other gastric upsets.

Do vitamin-enriched products touting everything from smoothing wrinkles to banishing sun spots really work? The efficacy of topical vitamins depends on the product and the label claims. Some do indeed work. Take vitamin E, for instance; when applied topically, it reduces stretch marks, scar formation following surgery, burns, and other skin injuries (apply it after wounds have closed).

There's a new wrinkle in the vitamin C story.



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