

Do I need to take a multivitamin?

Multivitamins are a cheap, convenient, and safe way to ensure your body is getting what it needs. A balanced, varied diet, including plenty of different colored fruits and vegetables, will meet your body's vitamin and mineral needs. As a student, however, eating patterns can greatly vary day to day and may not always be abundant in fruits and vegetables. Therefore, it's a good idea to take a multivitamin as a "safety-net" to ensure you are getting the nutrients you need.

In particular, it is especially a good idea to take a multivitamin if:

- ✓ Your diet is low in fruits and vegetables
- ✓ You eat the same foods everyday
- ✓ You are a strict vegetarian or vegan
- ✓ You're on a low-calorie diet for weight loss



How should I choose a multivitamin?

Choose a daily multivitamin. The Center for Science in the Public Interest listed these multivitamins as "Best Bets" for Men of all ages: CVS Daily Multiple 50 Plus, Eckerd Therapeutic M, Eckerd Vitab, Eckerd Vitamin A Day 50+, Kroger Thera Plus, and One A Day 50 Plus.

"Spin the Bottle — How to Pick a Multivitamin"
Nutrition Action Healthletter. January/February. 2003.

Here are a few tips when looking at the Supplements Facts panel:

- ✓ **Look for 100% of Daily Value for the following vitamins:** Thiamin (B1), Riboflavin (B2), Niacin (B3), Vitamin B6, Vitamin B12, Vitamin D, Vitamin E, and Folic Acid – (folic acid has shown a protective effect against heart disease in some studies). Remember, a vitamin is supplementing your diet. In general, these values should not be more than 100%.
- ✓ **Vitamin E:** Many multivitamins have more than 100% Daily Value for Vitamin E. Excessive amounts of vitamin E have been shown to worsen colds and have not shown protective effects against heart disease. Choose a multivitamin with close to the Daily Value of 22 IU/day and no more than 200 IU/day.

- ✓ **Vitamin C:** The new recommended level for Vitamin C for men is 90 mg per day or 150% of DV.
- ✓ **Vitamin K:** The recommended intake for vitamin K for men is 120mcg per day. Most multivitamins have much less than this. Look for at least 20 mcg or 25% DV. Eat plenty of leafy greens to meet your body's needs. Talk to a doctor if you are on a blood thinner before supplementing with vitamin K.
- ✓ **Vitamin A:** High levels of beta carotene have been linked to lung cancer in smokers. Furthermore, high levels of retinol, a different form of vitamin A, has been linked to an increased risk of hip fractures in women, men's bones have not yet been studied. Therefore, your multivitamin should not have excessive amounts of vitamin A – look for 50-100% of DV.
- ✓ **Iron:** Men do not need to supplement their diet with iron. Men should take a multivitamin that provides no more than 0 - 8mg of iron per day, to avoid iron overload.
- ✓ **Other Minerals:** Most values of minerals will be less than 100%, because recommended values have been lowered. A multivitamin should have minerals such as chromium, copper, selenium, zinc, and magnesium and will get you on your way to meeting your needs with the addition of food. You should not supplement minerals individually, because your body retains them and it is possible to get toxic levels.

How about individual vitamins, minerals or supplements?

My sister takes Calcium, do I need to?

There are studies that show that too much calcium may raise the risk of prostate cancer. Therefore, a male should get the recommended 1000 mg of calcium per day from food. 3 servings of milk, cheese and/or yogurt per day plus calcium in other foods will provide your needed calcium. See our "No Bones About It" handout for more info on Calcium containing foods.



Do B Vitamins increase energy and/or decrease stress?

There is no good evidence to support these claims. Stick to a multivitamin with 100% of Daily Value of B vitamins.

Do antioxidants prevent prostate cancer or heart disease?

Studies do not support that Vitamins C and E, selenium, and beta-carotene reduce one's risk of prostate cancer. The National Cancer Institute is still testing Vitamin E and Selenium's effect on prostate cancer in 35,000 men. Similarly, studies have not supported that vitamin E reduces one's risk of heart disease. For now, stick to a multivitamin.

Will selenium reduce my risk for Colon Cancer?

Studies have shown that people with higher blood selenium levels have a lower risk for colon polyps. As the research continues, it's smart to take a multivitamin that contains the Daily Recommended Value of 55 mcg/day. However, you do not need to take a separate supplement.

Do I need extra potassium?

Potassium is a critical mineral that has been shown to reduce blood pressure, stroke risk, occurrence of kidney stones, and slow bone loss. Most people do not consume enough potassium. However, potassium supplements can be toxic, so stick with a multivitamin/mineral that contains potassium and consume potassium-rich foods such as melons, oranges, and bananas.



Do I need to take protein supplements (powders or bars) to build muscle?

Most Americans eat more protein than is needed for even athletes to build muscles. It is fairly easy to provide your body with the needed amount of protein through diet and, therefore, usually supplements are not needed. See our handout "Protein – The Muscular Nutrient" for more information.

What about fish oil supplements?

The American Heart Association explains that omega-3 fatty acids benefit the heart of healthy people and people at risk for and who have cardiovascular disease. The AHA recommends that people eat fish, particularly fatty fish, 2 times per week. If you have specific questions about your risk for heart disease and taking fish oil supplements, talk with your doctor.

