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To Supplement or Not To Supplement, That is The Question!

In my clinical practice I am always being asked, "Do I need to take supplements or can I get all the nutrients I need from my diet?" I can only say that my observations and review of the diets of thousands of individuals further confirms my conviction that in today's hectic world, even the best intentions of eating a well balanced diet fall short of reality.

In today's industrialized society, the struggle to survive the every day pressures of making ends meet and feeding ourselves and our families, is not only very time consuming but expensive. But even if one had all the time and money in the world would our diet be adequate? An average adult maintaining a properly balanced diet of 2000 kcal. per day should include 50-60% carbohydrates (which would include fresh organic fruits and vegetables and unrefined, whole grains), 20-25% lean, organic protein, 20-25% fat (which would include a variety of mono and polyunsaturated fat) and less than 10% saturated fat. The food would have to be primarily raw, and constant measurement and scrutiny would have to be upheld in order to assure that one was getting the complete amount of unadulterated nutrients from that food. We also can not ignore the fact that in this modern world we don't have complete control over what we eat, how it is grown or prepared.

Up until the turn of the 20th century the majority of all of our food was grown on small farms. People would grow fresh fruits and vegetables in their gardens fertilized by recycling their waste through composting table scraps and livestock manure. Crop rotation was practiced and during the time of rest, bugs, worms and microorganisms performed the natural job of reconditioning the soil. Rivers and streams were generally not dammed allowing flooding to occur, where nutrient rich silt would saturate and replenish the land. Today farming is a gigantic commercial industry, where farms are no longer measured in acres but in square miles. Machines do most planting and harvesting and fertilization is done with chemicals. Bugs and microorganisms are destroyed by toxic pesticides. Instead of crop rotation, the land is forced to yield two, three or more crops a year through the use of growth stimulating hormones and genetic engineering. The rivers are damned and irrigation is strictly controlled, not taking into consideration that natural springs and rivers that have not been harnessed carry with them a rich supply of minerals and other vital nutrients. In order for a plant to grow into something that at least resembles a fruit or vegetable it must contain four primary elements: nitrogen, carbon, potassium, and phosphorus. These are the basic ingredients of chemical fertilizers but a plant will draw 70 or more other elements if they are available. That is the key. Are they available? Our body relies on these other elements to maintain health. Dr. Joel D. Wallach, Doctor of human and veterinarian medicine, as well as an expert in agriculture and human and animal nutrition author of the book "Rare Earths, Their Secret To Health and Longevity" talks about at the turn of the 20th century wheat consisted of 40% protein. Now it consists of only 9% protein. Back then you could get enough protein from just 2 slices of bread; today you would have to eat an entire loaf to get the same

amount. He also states that in 1948 spinach had 158 mg. of iron per 100 grams. In 1973 it was down to 27 mg. and today spinach has less than 2.2 mg of iron per 100 grams. It's not a wonder why this country is suffering from so much degenerative disease and obesity. People are literally starving. I am constantly hearing clients complain about never feeling satiated after a meal. All we are eating are empty calories and two hours later we are scavenging around for more food, while gorging ourselves with junk that is more of a burden on the body than sustenance.

In recent history, mankind has managed to drastically change the chemistry of the environment in which we live. "According to EPA studies, as much as 5,700,000,000 pounds of chemical pollutants are released into the environment we eat, breathe and live in, all in just one year." Consequently, our need for such vital micronutrients as antioxidants and chelating minerals has increased dramatically.

I like to think that as a health care practitioner I eat fairly well, certainly better than the people that I see on a daily basis. I try and practice what I preach. Several years ago I did an experiment with my own diet for a graduate paper at Bastyr College. In the experiment, I made a seven-day diary of my diet; I made sure I did not change any conditions that would be abnormal to my eating habits. I sent the diary to a special lab to be analyzed. The result of the analyses was startling. I was actually below the RDA in many areas. Understand that our Recommended Dietary Allowance is the least amount of nutrients we can get away with. With all of this considered the RDA is still about one notch up from disease and falls way short of being the optimum dietary requirements for good health.

Granted, there are many ways to approach dietary assessment and food intake analysis and some may prove to be more effective than others. However, I can only report after thorough assessment of thousands of clients' dietary profiles, that without exception, people require specific supplementation of one or more vitamin, mineral or enzyme preparation in order to attain and maintain the highest level of wellness. Taking into consideration the principle of biochemical individuality and the complex relationship between enzymes, and the vitamin and mineral interactions, body chemistry and dietary analysis provides a logical framework for any program of nutritional supplementation. One must always seek guidance on establishing such a program to be sure that one is taking the proper nutritional supplements and their correct dosages.

In conclusion, I do not believe that all of our nutritional requirements could or should be gotten from a bottle. On the contrary I feel more emphasis should be made on eating a proper balanced diet, conscientious of purer, cleaner, unprocessed, organic whole foods. However, after examining this issue in depth I do feel that we would be foolish and impractical if we relied solely on our food intake to satisfy the dietary needs of our modern lifestyle.