

Too Much Of A Good Thing?

Millions of people regularly take one or more vitamin supplements daily. Many perceive vitamins as the way to combat nutritional deficiency from a poor or inadequate diet. With so many in the population leading busy lives, processed, convenience foods have become the go-to items at the grocery store. Because these foods may not be nutritionally sound, the belief remains that supplements can fix the problem.

Research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Healthy Statistics found that more than half of all Americans take a vitamin supplement daily. According to a survey by Ipsos Reid for Health Canada, 71 percent of Canadians use natural health products, with vitamins, at 57 percent, topping the list of supplements used.

There even are nutritional testing companies that will draw blood and determine vitamin deficiencies, like NutriChem in Ottawa. The right vitamin mix is then created and personalized.

While vitamins can have their benefits, many health professionals say that the best way to get necessary vitamins is through the foods you eat. Furthermore, inexperienced people are simply taking their own cocktail of vitamins, and may be taking too much.

There is the perception that taking a certain amount can be beneficial, so that must mean that taking more of the vita-

min will have double or triple the benefits. What many people do not realize is that vitamins — although they are naturally forming in food — can carry side effects like any other medication. Taking too much of a certain supplement can lead to toxicity or different side effects. Even in moderate doses, there can be some side effects to vitamins as well.

VITAMIN A

There is particular concern over vitamin A. Taking high doses of antioxidant supplements such as vitamin A might do more harm than good. Some research shows that taking high doses of vitamin A supplements might increase the chance of death from all causes and possibly other serious side effects. It can also make liver disease worse and increase the risk of osteoporosis and hip fracture.

B COMPLEX VITAMINS

B complexes or groups of various B vitamins put together in the capsule are some of the more popular vitamins bought. Vitamin B deficiencies can lead to lack of energy and feelings of stress and anxiety and may contribute to difficulty with sleep. There is no magic number in terms of milligrams of B vitamins; however, taking too much can result in constipation, stomach upset, swelling, and even acne associated with B-12. Many people do not realize that some B vitamins can

cause drowsiness, so it's important not to drive until you determine the effects of the vitamins.

VITAMIN C

People rely heavily on vitamin C to boost the immune system and promote good health. It is reported that vitamin C is largely water-soluble, so toxicity is rare. But side effects can include diarrhea, nausea and possible dental decalcification.

VITAMIN D

Vitamin D has been touted as the wonder supplement in the past year. Taking vitamin D3, "the sunshine vitamin" can help regulate mood, improve sleep, regulate the circadian rhythm, among other things. Too much may cause nausea and vomiting, bone weakness, hypercalcemia — an excessive amount of calcium in the bloodstream, kidney stones and organ calcification.

CALCIUM

Calcium and vitamin D work together in the formation of strong bones. Again, too much of this supplement can lead to excessive amounts of calcium in the blood. Other side effects may include constipation and stomach upset, including excessive gas. Mental and mood changes, headaches, increased thirst, and other side effects are serious.



People unknowingly are taking too much of a vitamin supplement.

VITAMIN E

Toxicity from this vitamin may include gastric distress, fatigue, easy bruising and bleeding, muscle weakness, and diarrhea.

In addition to vitamins, other nutritional supplements have the potential to interact with medications being taken. St. John's Wort, for example, can affect cholesterol levels and the effectiveness of cho-

lesterol-lowering drugs. It also may have contraindications with other medicines.

Although vitamins and supplements are sold over the counter, that doesn't make them any safer than regulated medications. Individuals should always consult with a doctor before beginning supplements to find out the proper dosage and what vitamins may be beneficial or harmful.

Are School Lunches Getting Healthier?

Grilled cheese on a pretzel bun; maple burst pancakes; cold nachos; breaded chicken nuggets — these are some of the lunch options in school cafeterias across the country. Following streamlined government regulations aimed to make school lunches healthier, some parents are left scratching their heads wondering if anything has changed.

In January 2012, First Lady Michelle Obama and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack unveiled new standards for school meals that will result in healthier meals for kids across the nation. The new meal requirements will raise standards for the first time in more than 15 years and are expected to improve the health and nutrition of nearly 32 million kids that participate in school meal programs every school day. The healthier meal requirements are a key component of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which was championed by the First Lady as part of her Let's Move! campaign and signed into law by President Obama. The new standards align school meals with the latest nutrition science and the real-world circumstances of America's schools, according to the United States Department of Agriculture. The USDA indicates that there are a few main components of the new lunch and breakfast standards:

- * Offer students both fruits and vegetables every day of the week.

- * Substantially increase offerings of whole grain-rich foods.

- * Offer only fat-free or low-fat milk varieties.

- * Limit calories based on the age of the children being served to ensure proper portion size.

- * Increase the focus on reducing the amounts of saturated fat, trans fats and sodium.

These changes are not perfect, but many believe they are a step in the right direction. Some parents, however, feel the new stipulations are not stringent enough, particularly when it comes to work-arounds for some of the new policies. For example, syrupy canned fruit cocktails that are high in sugar count toward the fruit requirement in many schools.

Sodium content is another bone of contention. Research indicates that lowering sodium levels can reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease and hypertension. To adhere to the new lunch program, schools will have to cut sodium in lunches by more than 50 percent within 10 years. Currently, elementary school lunches contain roughly 1,300 mg of sodium. The goal is to lower that to 1,230 mg by the 2014/2015 school year, gradually dropping to 935 mg by 2017. Many parents and health experts feel sodium levels are not going down fast enough.

The new plan will also extend nutrition standards outside of the cafeteria. Foods and beverages sold in vending machines and through other venues on campus must also be modified to adhere to a healthy diet.

One company taking advantage of the United States' new school lunch standards is Domino's Pizza. It has developed its "Smart Slice" school lunch program, which meets the revised standards set by the USDA. Freshly baked and delivered to schools, "Smart Slice" features multiple nutritious ingredients like

New Recommendations On Dental X-Rays Could Be On The Horizon

A visit to the dentist often involves a check-up and a routine cleaning. Many dentists prefer to do annual X-rays as part of preventative care -- helping to diagnose oral problems that cannot be seen by the naked eye. However, new developments may change the frequency of dental X-rays.

The American Dental Association has reviewed recent studies that link yearly or more frequent dental X-rays to an increased risk of developing meningioma, the most commonly diagnosed brain tumor. The ADA's longstanding position on X-rays is that dentists should order dental X-rays for patients only when necessary for diagnosis and treatment. In addition, steps must be taken to safeguard patients against radiation while the X-rays are being taken.

CARE AND DILIGENT RECORDS KEEP PATIENTS SAFE

Since 1989, the ADA has published recommendations to help dentists ensure that patients' exposure to radiation



is as low as possible. The association encourages the use of abdominal shielding (e.g., protective aprons) and thyroid collars on all patients. In addition, the ADA recommends that dentists use E or F speed film, the two fastest film speeds available, or a digital X-ray.

In some cases, dentists ask patients when their most recent

dental X-rays were taken, especially if the patient is new to the practice. This happens frequently thanks to changes in dental coverage that force employees to choose a different dentist who accepts the new insurance.

But relying on a patient to recall their most recent X-rays is flawed. Studies have shown

that the ability to recall information is often imperfect, and, as a result, patients may get more frequent X-rays than is necessary. Therefore, carefully document when and where dental X-rays were given.

X-RAY STUDIES ACCURACY RAISE CONCERNS, QUESTIONS

While studies linking X-rays to brain tumors may have some basis in truth, the ADA has said that studies that look at the prevalence of X-rays and rates of cancer can be flawed if patient information is included based on the individuals' own recall of when X-rays took place. The type of X-ray the patient received also needs to be given consideration. X-rays taken decades ago relied on heavy concentrations of radiation. While research into the medical ramifications of frequent X-rays seems promising, the ADA encourages further research about the possible link between X-ray exposure and patient safety.

X-RAYS DO SERVE A PURPOSE

Although X-rays put the body in the path of radiation, the data collected from X-rays is important. Dental X-rays are valuable in helping dentists detect and treat oral health problems at an early stage. Many oral diseases can't be detected on the basis of a visual and physical examination alone, and dental X-rays can fill in the blanks about certain conditions, such as early-stage cavities, gum disease, infections or some types of tumors. How often dental X-rays should be taken depends on the patient's oral health, condition, age, risk for disease and any signs and symptoms of oral disease that the patient might be experiencing.

Patients should talk to their dentists if they have questions about their dental treatment. Patients also have the right to refuse X-rays or question their necessity at a dental visit.

Elderly Especially Susceptible To The Heat

Many people might choose a nice, hot day over a blustery, cold afternoon. However, excessively hot days can not only feel uncomfortable, but they can also prove life-threatening. Elderly men and women, in particular, are susceptible to the effects of hot temperatures.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people ages 65 and older are more prone to heat stroke and heat-related stress than those of other ages. Seniors' bodies are not able to adjust to sudden changes in temperature as quickly as younger people's. A chronic condition that affects the body's response to heat, as well as taking certain prescription medications also may play a role in seniors' susceptibility to the heat.

The City of Sacramento Department of Parks and Recreation says that around 370 deaths from heat-related illnesses occur across the United States each year. Nearly half of those deaths are people who are 65 and older. Prolonged heat exposure can take quite a toll on the average person. Factor in the more delicate health of many seniors, and the hot weather can be quite dangerous.

Further compounding the problem is higher energy costs. Seniors living on fixed incomes may not be able to afford to turn on air conditioners because of the power draw.

There are different types of heat-related injuries, though heat exhaustion and heat stroke are the most common.

Here are signs that a person may be experiencing one or the other.

HEAT EXHAUSTION

- * weakness
- * tiredness
- * heavy sweating
- * paleness
- * dizziness
- * nausea
- * vomiting
- * fainting
- * fast, weak pulse rate
- * headache
- * fast and shallow breathing

HEAT STROKE

- * extremely high body temperature (over 105 F)
- * red, hot and dry skin
- * absence of sweat
- * throbbing headache
- * dizziness
- * nausea

WHAT TO DO

Friends or family members should check in with an elder-

ly relative or friend when the weather is especially warm to ensure they're safely handling the heat.

In addition, people of all ages can take the following precautions to keep cool when the temperatures rise.

- * Drink cool, nonalcoholic beverages. Water and diluted fruit juices can help rehydrate the body quickly.

- * Restrict physical activity.

- * Take a cool shower or bath or wipe yourself down with a damp cloth.

- * Seek an air-conditioned environment. For those who won't or can't turn on the air conditioning, visit a shopping mall or library to keep cool. Some towns and cities also make cooling centers available in extreme heat.

- * Wear lightweight clothing.

- * Try to remain indoors during the hottest hours of the day.

- * Wear hats or use an umbrella to shield your head



Check on an elderly friend or family member at least twice a day to ensure that he or she is not experiencing symptoms of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

from sunshine outdoors.

- * Eat cool foods, but avoid extremely cold foods. Otherwise you risk the chance of developing stomach cramps.

- * Do not do laundry or turn

on appliances that contribute to extra indoor heat.

The heat is nothing to take lightly, especially when it comes to seniors' health.

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