

The EASY way out

Approximately 150 million Americans take dietary supplements. No doubt shoppers get confused trying to decide which bottle to pluck from a myriad on the shelf. Who wouldn't? There's a tablet, capsule or powder to help you see, move or think better than you ever have before. How do you choose? Sometimes it's best to just take the easy way out by taking a multi-vitamin-mineral (MVM).



Why an MVM

The MVM started out as a combination of vitamins and minerals considered essential to health because the body does not make enough of them or doesn't make them at all. In the 100 years or so since their initial discovery, scientists have been slowly untying one nutrient from another to determine its function within the body. What they found was vitamins and minerals are interdependent in nature. A lack of even one upsets the body's biochemical processes as a whole.

In the 1940s a classification system was set up by the National Academy of Sciences based on age, gender and for pregnant and lactating women known as the Recommended Daily Allowance or RDA. Currently, these RDAs are being reviewed and amended, with a name change to Reference Daily Intake (RDIs). Since science is dynamic, the RDIs should not be set in stone either. But the RDI numbers are only part of the problem. Yesterday's simplistic one-a-day vitamins may not meet today's health needs. National surveys report that a MVM is the single most consistently taken supplement yet Americans are still low in key nutrients like magnesium (76%), calcium (66%), vitamins A (60%), B6 (58%) and E (68%). How is that possible if the RDIs are enough?

The MVM Quiz

What's the best way to take an MVM?

- Make MVMs a daily habit.
- Take in divided doses through the day.
- Eat a balanced diet based on the food pyramid.
- Maintain a healthy digestive system.
- Find a supplement friendly doc.
- Buy quality to get quality health benefits.
- All of the above.

Answer: All of the above



What's Really in the Bottle

The label, not the marketing, is your answer. The only way to know what's inside is to read the *Supplement Facts* box, usually on the reverse side of the bottle. Keep in mind that the FDA requires food and supplement manufacturers to use the term Daily Value (DV), not RDA, on their labels. You'll find how much of the ingredient is in each serving and other nutrient specific details such as the form and source. Is it natural vitamin E or synthetic? Mineral chelates or inorganic forms? Some MVM makers skimp on trace minerals, bypass chelates and/or include less than DV amounts to keep the price low so you'll buy based on cost. Comparing fact box to fact box is the only way to value shop.

Token vs Therapeutic Amounts

The DVs are relatively low quantities so most MVMs should contain the 100% minimum. Exceptions are calcium and magnesium which may be limited due to their higher DVs and if a chelate is used. Some multiples market for age and gender. "Designer MVMs" may tout a "hot" new nutrient to catch your interest. Lutein is one example. As a bioflavonoid, it's been shown to slow down the progression of macular degeneration which leads to blindness at 6-10 mg daily doses. MVMs that

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advertise lutein for eye health deceive buyers into thinking they are getting a therapeutic amount which may not be in the bottle. Don't be taken by token amounts!

Patented Nutrients

On the other hand, some nutraceutical or pharmaceutical companies may purposely research and patent a specific form of a nutrient or ingredient. A few examples of patented nutrients include Albion's Gold Medallion® minerals, Aquamin® TG-red Algae Sea Minerals, FloraGlo® lutein, Lonza's Carnipure™ and Opti-MSM®. These highly bioavailable ingredients are designed to deliver optimum nutrient absorption and utilization. Although MVMs with patented ingredient cost more, you're gaining a health advantage with a proven outcome based on research.

Type & Potency

What is the best type of MVM to take? A capsule or powder formulation may deliver nutrients more efficiently because of their ability to break down more easily, even with a variety of ingredients. Adequate stomach pH and good GI health are also factors. Having said that, supplements undergo disintegration tests in a laboratory to make sure they meet FDA set guidelines. A tablet or capsule that passes through the GI tract intact is of no nutritional benefit to you!

According to FDA labeling guidelines, a MVM must contain 100% of the DV in two-thirds of its ingredients to be considered high potency. However, as mentioned, a good MVM is not just about numbers but quality, bioavailable ingredients. You benefit only from what you absorb.

A real high potency MVM will have to be taken in more than one dose but that's a good thing. When mineral chelates are included, they take up a lot of space in a capsule. Likewise, the more nutrients a MVM contains, the more "room" it needs. (If you picture a lot of different sized people at a party, you'll get the idea. Either you need a large room or several smaller ones!).

Taking smaller amounts during the day, like meals, keeps your nutrient levels more consistent. Plus, it's easier to tailor your MVM in the true sense of supplementing by taking more or less capsules based on what you're eating on any given day.

Another consideration of DV is the ranges are still based on healthy people, not those with diseases or chronic conditions which may require higher than DV levels. Vitamin testing can be done and specific nutrients that might be low can be adjusted per individual deficiencies. Medications and lifestyle also can rob essential nutrients, too.

Our Future is Now

As scientists look closer at the nutritional needs of the human body, they've learned that we can change the future but it starts now. Each factor below ties into the other but this triple threat is no match for a comprehensive MVM.

“Multivitamins are a convenient, smart and proven way to bridge between what we should eat and what we actually eat.”

Council for Responsible Nutrition

Diet Factor vs MVM



You'd need to eat all these foods to equal only a fraction of the vitamins & minerals in Multi-Gold™

Alpha Lipoic Acid 30 mg

402 lb Beef Liver

B1 25 mg

20 Cups Brown Rice

B2 25 mg

457 Slices Wheat Bread

B6 25 mg

9 lbs Chicken

B12 200 mcg

7 lbs Salmon

Vitamin C 300 mg

72 Spears Asparagus

Vitamin D 1,000 IU

40 Eggs

Vitamin E 200 IU

5 lb Peanut Butter

Chromium 120 mcg

5 Cups Broccoli

Magnesium 100 mg

3 Bananas

Selenium 200 mcg

15 oz Salmon

Zinc 15 mg

4 Cups Baked Beans



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Aging

Aging may be accelerated by our inability to absorb and efficiently utilize nutrients from food, leaving us short-supplied to rebuild and repair. Numerous studies show that taking supplements preventively reduces the leading degenerative diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and osteoporosis which affect our mortality and quality of life.

A 2006 *Dietary Supplement Education Alliance* report estimates saving 17 billion dollars in healthcare costs by taking adequate calcium, vitamin D and folic acid. Supplementing with an MVM can help you reach optimal nutrient levels.

Genetics

Another predisposition to disease is our gene pool. Mitochondria in each cell contain genetic material or “instruction codes” for that cell. They’re also the tiny powerhouses that provide ATP to keep cells alive. The ATP energy chain requires certain B vitamins and is magnesium dependent. Protecting the health of the mitochondria is critical. Damaged mitochondria result in cell death and/or dysfunction. MVMs that include antioxidants minimize free radical damage to these important cellular structures.



Immunity & Stress

A strong immune system may make the difference between why one person gets a disease and another doesn't. The free radical theory of aging is not new but today's accelerated lifestyle pumps up the stress volume.

The adrenals are the tiny organs which hype us with cortisol, norepinephrine and adrenaline. These hormones decrease magnesium levels, increase anxiety and tighten muscles. Less magnesium means an increased risk of hypertension, diabetes and heart disease.



You'll use up your B vitamins to “de-stress” and vitamin C to curb cortisol production. To compensate for increased free radical activity, you'll need antioxidants (vitamins A, C, E and minerals zinc and selenium) for damage control.

With a MVM, it's all in there – calming magnesium, B vitamins and antioxidants.

Summary

We have the benefits today of a body of historical knowledge on human nutrition and its connection to disease. More than 300 clinical papers a year show that optimal levels of supplements enhance health while deficiencies result in disease. Despite the fact that a MVM is the single most popular supplement, national surveys show that most Americans fail to get their DVs. Perhaps the problem lies

Profile of a Regular MVM User

Improved immunity

Better health & eating habits

Lower risk of chronic diseases

Coronary Artery Disease **52%** lower

Diabetes **73%** lower

Emphysema **45%** lower

Heart Attack **49%** lower

High cholesterol **22%** lower

Hypertension **39%** lower

Source: NHANES 2001-2002 Study; Block G, *Nutri J* 10/07

in the outdated DVs and/or the mindset that a one-a-day is all you need. For less than a dollar a day, a quality MVM can be a “nutritional insurance policy”. Seems like an easy way out to me.

Resources

1. <http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov/>
2. National Center for Health Statistics www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhanes.htm
3. www.orthomolecular.org
4. *PDR for Nutritional Supplements*. www.pdrhealth.com
5. Squires, M. What a Difference a Daily Makes. *Health Points*. Vol 10 Iss 4 2003.
6. Squires, M. Multi-Nutritional Approach to Health, stacking the odds in your favor. *Health Points*, Vol 6 Iss 4 2001.
7. Squires, M. Questions to Ask Before You Supplement Shop. *Health Points*, Vol 14 Iss 1 2008.

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