

# News Of Nutrition

## Clearing Up The Confusion About Nutritional Supplements

(NAPSA)—Americans have heard a lot of mixed messages about vitamins and may be wondering if they are safe and effective. As with most health questions, it's smart to look at multiple information sources to get the true picture on nutritional supplementation.

"The total body of scientific evidence overall supports the benefits of nutritional supplementation," reports certified clinical nutritionist Neil E. Levin, nutrition education manager at NOW Foods in Bloomingdale, Ill. "Surveys show that most people trust vitamins, relying on them as a form of nutritional insurance, and most doctors surveyed recommend them to their patients."

The Lewin Group has published evidence-based research reporting that the proper use of certain dietary supplements can save billions of dollars in health care costs while improving the quality of life and preserving the independence of seniors.

The occasional negative report, however sensational, should be regarded skeptically when contrasted with a solid body of evidence. According to the FDA's Consumer Update, it's a smart idea to "think twice about chasing the latest headline. Sound health advice is generally based on research over time, not a single study touted by the media."

Standard study designs for drug research shouldn't be used for nutrient research because drugs are novel substances not normally present in the food supply or the human body, while nutrients are commonly found in both places. This makes screening out variables much more difficult



**When choosing supplements, it's best to base your selections on a body of quality scientific research, not just a single study.**

in nutrient studies, sometimes overwhelming competent pharmaceutical researchers who are inexperienced in the study of vitamins and other supplements.

Several articles in prestigious scientific journals such as *The New England Journal of Medicine* and *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* suggest that well-designed observational studies provide more accurate ways to evaluate nutritional effects in people than the "gold standard" methods utilized in drug research.

Jeffrey Blumberg, Ph.D., of Tufts University points out that you can't have a control group with zero exposure to nutrients because everybody eats. Additionally, most nutrients are interactive, with beneficial effects on multiple body systems, yet randomized controlled studies are designed to investigate only single outcomes. He agrees that observational studies are a more accurate way to see how nutrients affect health because they are more likely to include the broad population and bear a closer relationship to real-world use of foods and supplements.

A number of nutritional supple-

ments have shown clear health benefits supported by good scientific research, including:

- **Vitamin D:** This has been shown to benefit bones and teeth, strengthen the immune system and support cardiovascular health.

Americans are often found to be deficient in the "sunshine vitamin" because so many of us avoid direct sun exposure. Seasonal flu occurs far more frequently from autumn through early spring, and intervention studies have shown a direct relationship between low serum vitamin D levels and the number of respiratory infections reported.

- **Multiple Vitamins:** The American Medical Association has recommended that most people take a daily multivitamin to supplement a healthy diet for optimum nutrition. It helps fill in nutrient gaps when dietary levels may be insufficient.

- **Omega-3 Fatty Acids:** In addition to helping protect heart, brain and nerve health, omega-3s have been shown to have wide-ranging health benefits for inflammatory issues, such as joint problems.

- **Vitamin E:** A well-publicized report warning against vitamin E supplementation has been seriously undermined by subsequent reports. A vast body of evidence actually shows major health benefits from supplementing this essential vitamin. Long-term studies looking at vitamin E intake from both food and supplements, confirmed by measures of blood levels, support the idea that this antioxidant nutrient prolongs life and health in the general public.

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