

## HEALTH

## Supplements: are they your support?

*Vitamin supplements are intended to complement diets of the figureconscious women. But do they replace the balance of food elements that are important to a healthy diet? Not exactly. SAVIA RAJAGOPAL muscled in on some facts*

Dietary supplements are heralded as the panacea for all ills but anything in excess of the upper tolerable limit (UL) can create some problems of their own. After all, too much of a good thing can be bad!

**Myth: When it comes to vitamins, more is better.**

**Fact:** Too much of a good thing can be bad. The same applies to vitamin and mineral supplements. There is a fixed daily dose. Most of the requirements are derived from our food. In case of malnutrition and sickness, it may be required in therapeutic doses. There is also an Upper Limit to the quantum of intake. So long as these vitamins are present in your body, there is no added benefit gained from extra vitamins. Dr Jhoomer Kulshrestha, nutritionist, says. "More is better" is not a correct statement as individual requirements are different. There can be deficiency of a particular vitamin in a person and she may not need multivitamins. Also, there is a possibility of suffering from hypervitaminosis where the problem occurs due to consumption of too much vitamin. Extra watersoluble vitamins like B and C can be flushed out of the system but extra fat-soluble vitamins such as A, D, E, K might get stored in the liver and become toxic if taken in large amounts."

**Myth: Even if vitamins do not help, at least they don't hurt.**

**Fact:** Do not make assumptions. When consumed in high amounts for a long time, all chemicals can be toxic, including nutrients like vitamins and minerals. Most doctors advise professional consultation before taking any supplements. There is not enough data to suggest adverse reactions to consistent nutrient consumption, but in cases of the upper intake level, dangers are real enough to merit caution. Dr. Rajeshwari Shetty, an expert dietician, states, "It is wrong to think that even if supplements don't help, it will not harm. Supplements should only be taken only when medically needed. Too much of calcium for example, can cause kidney stones. Women who do not get their daily allowance of Vitamin E, can take a supplement only when required."

**Myth: Vitamins are a source of energy. So taking multivitamins regularly is good for your body.**

**Fact:** Vitamins by themselves do not provide energy. Eating a healthy well-balanced diet will give you energy. By themselves, supplements help prevent nutritional deficiency, and in low calorie diets (less than 1200 calories per day), vitamin supplements provide missing nutrients. Dietician Rashmi Anvekar from Hinduja Hospital recommends, "Vitamins cannot give you energy as they do not contain any calories. Vitamins and minerals help build immunity. Normal supplementation of carbohydrates, fats, and proteins is absolutely essential." In a nutshell, vitamins cannot make up for a poor diet.

**Myth: Vitamin C supplements help in preventing cold and cures sinus.**

**Fact:** There is no scientific basis that states Vitamin C supplements prevent cold and sinus problems. Nobel Prize Winner Linus Pauling advocated large doses (1 gram/day) of Vitamin C to prevent common cold. But research on large

doses of vitamin C show no significant effect on common cold. It is also unclear whether large doses of vitamin C decrease the duration of

cold symptoms. Dr. T.

Narayanan, general physician, reaffirms this saying,

“There has been no

positive proof on Vitamin

C reducing the chances of common cold. Vitamin C in excess can cause gastro intestinal problems like nausea, diarrhoea, and stomach cramps.”

**Myth: Vitamins and mineral supplements help one overcome stress.**

**Fact:** Daily stresses of life do not increase the need for any supplements. Only under extreme physical stress, such as severe illness or surgery, might extra vitamins help. “Apart from helping in oxidative stress which, Vitamin C does, rest of the claims are yet to be clearly defined,” says

