



Who needs a supplement?

We all need help sometimes. In Nutrition, that help is called a supplement – a boost of essential nutrients not found in our usual diet for one reason or another. Who needs to take supplements? That depends. Like extra workers, dietary supplements fill in nutritional gaps. Here are some common ones that may call for a dietary supplement:

1. Nutritional anemias. Most common are deficiencies of iron, foliate, vitamin D or B12, all which can be identified with blood tests.
2. Strict vegan diet (no animal products). Most vegans need supplemental vitamin b12.
3. Pregnancy. Because pregnancy is a critical time for mom and baby, appropriate and timely vitamin and mineral supplementation is recommended for the best pregnancy outcomes, according to the latest position paper on the subject by the American Dietetic Association. Ideally, women should be taking a supplement that contains folic acid before they become pregnant and 600mcg a day during pregnancy to reduce the risk for birth defects. Pregnant women also need additional iron, 27mg a day routinely to provide for the additional needs of pregnancy and 60mg daily if she has iron deficiency anemia.
4. Diet devoid of one or more major food groups. If dairy foods are few and far between in your diet, a supplement of calcium and vitamin D is probably in order. Or if you have high sugar intact daily and not many veggies, a daily multivitamin and mineral supplement can help fill in some important nutrient gaps.
5. Chronic diseases like diabetes and cancer. Long-term medical conditions can deplete the body of nutrients, or make it difficult to eat adequate amounts of nutrient-dense foods. A daily multivitamin mineral supplement is often advised for people with these conditions.
6. Use of medications that deplete the body of important nutrients. People who take certain medications such prednisone for arthritis conditions are advised to take supplements of calcium and vitamin D to help prevent the bone loss associated with this medication. Knowing what and how much to take is not the lay person to figure out – please contact your health care provider for proper dosing guidelines for your individual situation. Lastly, excessive amounts of some supplements can cause more problems than they were intended to solve. People with kidney disease, for example, should take nutritional supplements only with their doctor's approval.

Based on article by Barbara Quinn, The Monterey County Herald.