

Have You Helped Your Heart Today? Getting the Nutrients You Need

Nutrients are all the chemicals (vitamins, minerals, fatty and amino acids) that keep us alive. We need them all the time. They're there in the foods we eat. Did you know that only breast milk supplies every nutrient. To get all the nutrients you must eat a wide variety of unprocessed foods.

Most unprocessed foods contain a number of different nutrients, some more than others. For instance, plant foods are the only good sources of Vitamin C and antioxidants, dairy products are high in calcium and only animal products provide vitamin B12.

Processing removes nutrients which is why so many packaged foods are "enriched". They're not better, they're just replacing the chemical equivalent of the natural nutrients removed during manufacture.

Even though our diets are less than perfect and many Americans have a weakness for processed foods, most of us eat more than enough to get the vitamins and minerals we need. To compensate for our less than perfect diets many Americans take supplements. Doctors usually recommend a daily multivitamin especially for young children, pregnant women and the elderly.

Multivitamins usually have up to 100% of daily recommended amounts for the vitamins and minerals in a single dose. Look for a reputable brand and one that is appropriate for your age, gender and activity level. Multivitamins are safe but more is not always better. Some nutrients can be harmful in large dosages.

According the Harvard School of Public Health "The current recommended intake of vitamin A is 5,000 IU for men and 4,000 IU for women. However, there is some evidence that 10,000 IU might increase the risk of hip fracture or some birth defects. Another reason to avoid too much preformed vitamin A is that it may interfere with the beneficial actions of vitamin D.

Beta-carotene is a natural form of Vitamin A. It is found in red, orange, yellow and dark green fruits and vegetables such as green plants, cantaloupe, carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, spinach, apricots, and green peppers, whole grains and oil. In contrast to preformed vitamin A, beta-carotene is not toxic even at high levels of intake.

A good rule of thumb is: eat a variety of different kinds of foods, limit junk food and don't follow fad diets that restrict one or another food category.

For more information contact The Health Heart Program of the Columbia County Department of Health (518) 828-3358 ext 1314/15 or log on to <http://www.columbiacountynyny.com/depts/health/heart.html>