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Being Healthy: Vitamins & Minerals

Magnesium deficiency?

Many people believe they need to take magnesium supplements for their bones as well as symptoms such as fatigue, muscle aches and insomnia. The truth is that there is no evidence to support these claims and true magnesium deficiency is uncommon. When it does happen, it's usually older people or those with absorption issues such as celiac disease or other digestive problems, alcoholism or kidney disease. If you have these concerns your doctor can have your blood checked.

Vitamin D: healthy bones; when to supplement & how much

Osteoporosis continues to be a risk for some people but there are many things that can be done to reduce this risk. Daily weight-bearing exercise goes a long way (for example, walking). Calcium is an essential mineral for bone production - 1000mg for those 50 and under and 1200mg over 50. Finally, vitamin D; your skin manufactures vitamin D with sun exposure. Look to supplements only to make up the difference you lack from diet or sun.

Normally, your body can make all the vitamin D it requires by exposing the skin of the face, arms, legs or back to the sun for 5-30 minutes, twice weekly. Things that can interfere with this process are wearing sunscreen, your distance from the equator (Canada!), air quality (smog can reduce vitamin D production) and skin colour (dark skin makes less vitamin D). If you feel you need to supplement, it's generally recommended that you take no more than 1000 iu daily.

The recent news about vitamin D has spawned all kinds of claims for its powers: supposedly it can all but cure cancer, depression, arthritis and a host of other conditions. However, a recent study from France is pointing out that the low vitamin D levels associated with some of these conditions may be due to them, not the cause of them! There is ongoing research to elicit more details on the relationship, but in the meantime keep any doses you take in the recommended ranges only.

Just how much calcium, vitamin D or other vitamins and minerals should you be taking on a day-to-day basis? Talk to your pharmacist for some sound advice that will help you be healthy and avoid overdose pitfalls.