

Vitameatavegamin:

Why Vitamins and Minerals Are Important for the Human Body

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In 1952, Lucille Ball gave the performance of a lifetime during the “I Love Lucy” episode “Lucy Does a TV Commercial.”

During the episode, Lucy presented a product called “Vitameatavegamin” – a fictitious health tonic said as an elixir which contained concentrated “vitamins, meat, vegetables, and minerals.” The product promised to aid individuals who felt “tired, run-down, and listless” (Hernandez, 2010).

Though her crazy antics and hilarious comedic delivery had people buckling over in laughter, was there was some substance to what she was saying? Maybe vitamins and minerals really could help those who felt “tired, run-down, and listless”.

Discussion

Vitamins and Minerals

Vitamins and minerals are important for the human body for a number of reasons; but what are the differences between vitamins and minerals?

According to the article “Vitamins and Minerals”, “Although they are all considered micronutrients, vitamins and minerals differ in basic ways. Vitamins are organic and can be broken down by heat, air, or acid. Minerals are inorganic and hold on to their chemical structure.

So why does this matter? It means the minerals in soil and water easily find their way into your body through the plants, fish, animals, and fluids you consume. But it’s tougher to shuttle vitamins from food and other sources into your body because cooking, storage, and simple exposure to air can inactivate these more fragile compounds” (n.d.).

Vitamins are small food particles that are absent of calories, yet are needed to have good health. Vitamins A, D, E, and K are fat-soluble. Other vitamins, including all the B vitamins and Vitamin C, are water-soluble, and a person's body can only retain them for a short time; it is important that they are consumed often (Kemper, 1999, p. 299).

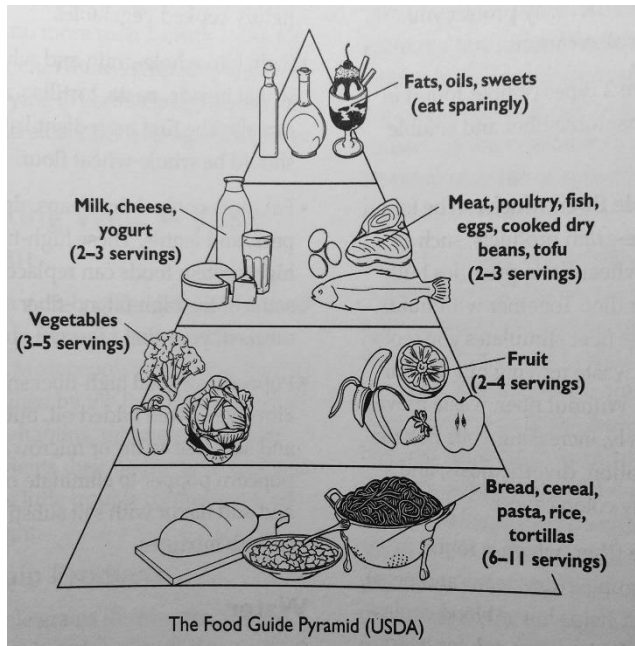


Figure 1. The Food Guide Pyramid (USDA)

Vitamins are good for a person's body – especially if that person eats less than 1,500 calories per day. Most people who eat a balanced diet and take in the necessary vitamins from the main food groups of the food pyramid do not need to take a vitamin-mineral supplement.

According to Kemper (1999), "...certain vitamins found in foods have been shown to prevent some diseases" (p. 299).

Minerals, like vitamins, are also important for the human body. Minerals play many important roles in the arrangement and workings of the body and are needed to form and sustain healthy teeth and bones; to carry nerve signals to and from your brain; to carry oxygen to your cells; to regulate blood sugar levels; and to maintain a healthy immune system" (Kemper, 1999, p. 299). Kemper (1999) states that "...calcium is the primary mineral needed for building and maintaining strong bones" (p. 299).

A Well-Balanced Diet

Nutrients are needed to keep the body healthy and many times, our diet just doesn't provide enough nutrients to us; thus, we require vitamins and minerals to meet our body's need for said nutrients. Our ultimate goal, however, should be to have a diet that provides what we need so that we do not have to take vitamins and minerals.

According to Philip Hagen and Martha Millman, authors of *Mayo Clinic guide to self-care: Answers for everyday health problems*:

To improve your health and help prevent disease, it's important to eat a well-balanced diet – one rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains and low in saturated fat.

But what about dietary supplements – pills, capsules and other products – that claim to fight off illness or improve disease symptoms?...The American Dietetic Association and other major medical organization all agree that the best way to get the vitamins and minerals you need is through a nutritionally balanced diet. But sometimes a supplement may be appropriate...

Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) describe the average amount of each vitamin and mineral needed each day to meet the needs of nearly all healthy people. They're determined by the Food and Nutrition Board of the Institute of Medicine, part of the National Academy of Sciences. RDAs for some vitamins and minerals vary according to your sex or age, or both (pp. 261, 263, 265).

It is important to remember that even though vitamins and minerals are on the market, they should not replace a well-balanced and healthy diet.

According to the article “Supplements can’t replace benefits of healthy foods:”

The foundation of a healthy diet includes lean proteins, whole grains, fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy and healthy fats.

Each food group supplies the body with different vitamins and minerals needed for proper growth, development and health...

Moreover, foods provide much more than just vitamins and minerals. Whole foods contain powerful compounds and chemicals that work synergistically to improve the nutritional potential of the diet, far beyond what is possible from individual nutrients or supplements (NCAA.org 2013).

Conclusion

While it is more important to obtain necessary nutrients from a well-balanced and healthy diet, vitamins, minerals and other supplements are still available on the market to ensure you’re giving your body what it needs.

Confirm with your doctor if this option is right for you. And maybe – just maybe – by getting more nutrients into your system, you won’t feel so “tired, run-down, and listless.”

Think about it.

References

1. Figure 1. The Food Guide Pyramid (USDA). Adapted from *Healthwise handbook: A self-care guide for you and your family* (14th ed.) (p. 296) by D.W. Kemper (1999) Boise, ID: Healthwise. Copyright 1999 by Healthwise. Adapted with permission.
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