
Vitamin Power

C – can help you see: A new finding from the long-running Nurses' Health Study of more than 80,000 women suggests that taking Vitamin C supplements (4500 to 7000 mgs a day) for more than 10 years will lower your risk of **cataracts**.

D – offers calcium a helping hand: Vitamin D supplements increase calcium's **bone-saving** effectiveness for older women. Says Bess Dawson-Hughes, M.D., of the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University. Dr. Dawson-Hughes suggests that future vitamin D recommendations for women over 70 should soar to 600 milligrams per day, triple the current level.

Magnesium gives your heart a break: Getting an adequate supply of magnesium helps your body **convert food to energy**. This mineral also helps you **use about 10 per cent less oxygen**, which puts less stress on your heart. The USDA Human Nutrition Research Center recommends 280 mgs. A day for women. It is also wise to get magnesium from food rather than supplements because food provides an entire "package" of nutrients. Good magnesium sources are: onions, green peas, spinach, potatoes, peanut butter and tofu.

The Chromium Connection: A joint study by Richard A. Anderson, PhD., of the USDA Human Nutrition Research Center and researchers at Beijing Medical University shows that when people with Type II diabetes take chromium supplements of between 200- 1000 micrograms, their **blood sugar, insulin and cholesterol levels drop**. "This mineral is very safe and very hard to get from food, so I recommend that all people take a balanced daily multi-vitamin plus 200 micrograms of chromium," says Dr. Anderson.

Versatile E: Vitamin E protects arteries by latching onto "bad" cholesterol so they can't react with molecules that damage artery walls. In one study involving 2,000 patients with heart disease, researchers found that taking supplements of 400 or 800 IU per day for 18 months **reduced the risk of new heart attacks** by 75%. Moderate doses of vitamin E may help seniors fight off colds.

Attention Couch-potatoes: When you begin to exercise, taking an 800 mg. Vitamin E capsule every day for the first month can minimize muscle damage by preventing reactions with free radicals that cause inflammation.

B is for baby...and mom too: Folic acid is so effective at **reducing the risk of neural-tube birth defects** (such as Spina Bifida), that the FDA now requires food manufacturers to include it in most of their grain products. Adequate levels of two B vitamins can dramatically **reduce a woman's risk of heart attack**, according to the Nurses' Health Study. A diet with supplements or foods that provide more than 400 mg of folic acid and 3 mg of vitamin B6 a day can cut a woman's risk of heart attack by almost half.

Super Selenium: A daily supplement of 200 micrograms of selenium produces a 50% **overall drop in cancer mortality**, plus a significantly lower risk of prostate cancer (63%), colon cancer (58 %), and lung cancer (46%), according to University of Arizona researchers.

Potassium brings down the pressure: A John Hopkins meta-analysis of 33 clinical trials shows that consuming 2,500 mg of potassium daily can **lower blood pressure** by several points. Good food sources of potassium include bananas and seedless raisins.

ARE SUPPLEMENTS NECESSARY?

Yes, for *some* people and *some* nutrients, says Bonnie Liebman, R.D., director of nutrition at the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Liebman recommends a daily multivitamin, multimineral supplement as low-cost health insurance, and *The Western Journal of Medicine* agrees. In a recent editorial, *The Journal* said that if all American women of childbearing age took a daily multivitamin with zinc and folic acid, and all older Americans took vitamin E supplements each day, our national hospital bill could be lowered by \$20 billion a year. The rate of birth defects and low-birthweight infants would drop, as would the rate of heart disease.

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