



Do You Know Why You're Taking Those Supplements?

by Eve Pearson, RD, CSSD, LD, CPT

It seems like every day I've got someone asking me what pills they should be taking. Sometimes it's for weight loss, and sometimes it's just to be healthy. But the other day it was, "What can I take to make me hungry?!" Supplements are a billion dollar industry in America, so one would think with everything out there, the magic pill is right on the shelf in front of them. NEWS FLASH – it's not! At least not yet. Companies will tell you anything and get five different doctors to endorse their products (by paying them a lot of money by the way) to get you, the consumer, to believe that taking only 20 pills a day will make you lose weight or feel better. If you read really closely though, chances are somewhere on that magic pill bottle, it says that it works best when coupled with a healthy diet and exercise.

I know that a busy lifestyle prevents most of us from making great food choices every single day. So, you may choose a few supplements to take care of those anticipated deficiencies. Here are some supplements that research has shown benefit healthy individuals (that is, individuals with no diagnosed diseases):

- 1) Specific vitamins and/or minerals when there are known nutrient deficiencies,
- 2) Iron to treat some anemias,
- 3) Caffeine for the improvement of sports performance,
- 4) Omega 3 Fatty Acids to aid in lowering triglycerides and in the prevention of heart disease,
- 5) Creatine to increase lean muscle mass.

As to the other hundreds of thousands of supplements that are available, the jury is out on whether or not they provide any benefit at all. Remember that these supplements are not regulated by any governing body. As my clients have heard me state, I can chop my hair up and put it in a pill inside a pretty bottle with a great marketing plan and make billions. No one cares that the nutrients I've listed on the back of the bottle aren't really in there. Knowing this, wouldn't you want to be a little more careful when you're searching for that magic pill next time. Check out www.usp.org or www.consumerlab.com to make sure the supplements you're using are tested for purity and potency. Also note that supplement dosage needs vary based on family history, daily food intake, body weight, gender and many other factors and some supplements do interfere with medication.

All in all, a healthy daily intake can help tremendously with those afternoon energy "dips," the cold you can't seem to get rid of season after season, and even your "per mile" speed. The bottom line:

- 1) Don't believe everything you read.
- 2) If you're asked why you're taking something, you should be able to explain why you're taking it and why in that amount.
- 3) More is not better.