

## DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS AND EXERCISE

Many people take these, usually for very good reasons.... but what exactly do they do, why do we need them, and what is their value ?

You can't open a magazine without being bombarded with claims for this or that product, and today we have an unparalleled choice. Here are some pros and cons of key supplements – remember though that a nutritionally balanced diet will contain everything you need anyway....for more information visit [www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk/healthydiet/)

**Multivitamins:** dietary reference values are suggested daily intakes of nutrients – they form guidance and suggest the amount of an individual nutrient that healthy people need. They are usually given as daily intakes, and if you use a multivitamin it shouldn't be your only source of vitamins. They may be of use if you're on a diet, to ensure the correct daily intake of nutrients, but should not be used to compensate for a poor diet.

**Iron Supplements:** essential for normal body function. It helps transport oxygen and regulate growth. People who need iron supplements might include pregnant women, women who suffer heavy periods, or people with gastrointestinal disorders who don't absorb iron normally. As excessive iron intake can cause serious health issues, supplements should only be taken on the advice of a GP.

**Calcium Supplements:** the most common mineral in the body is found in some foods, added to others, and common as a dietary supplement. We use it for muscle contraction, blood vessel regulation, production of hormones, and in nervous system. Supplements are helpful for sufferers of osteoporosis who may need more than the 700 mg a day recommendation. 1 pint of skimmed milk contains 600mg, a pot of plain yoghurt about 300mg, and 200g of baked beans 90mg. The food standards agency says that amounts in excess of 1500mg per day are not normally recommended. Vegetarians might want to access additional information at the Vegetarian Society website at [www.vegsoc.org/index.html](http://www.vegsoc.org/index.html)

**Antioxidants:** when you are exercising at a low level (aerobically), the body produces *free radicals*, which may cause cell damage over a long period. The body has a natural defence against these, but people who exercise regularly may benefit from supplements of antioxidants to help. Some of the pros of antioxidants are less muscle soreness after exercise, more resilient immune system and better muscle repair after heavy activity. Cons are, as with many supplements, that high doses over a long period may cause more harm than good, so naturally occurring antioxidants will always be better – foods high in natural antioxidants are fruit and vegetables (especially carrots); flavonoids in citrus fruit, tea, and red wine (!), nuts, seeds and wheatgerm, onions, leeks and garlic. As a rough guide, the more colour the higher the antioxidant level.

**Finally, and very importantly: check with your Doctor to ensure it's safe to take any supplements.**

*Alan Clinch*