

The GREAT Supplement Debate Are They For You?

By **Jamison Hill**

Supplements can be beneficial just as they can be a complete waste of money and in-take. They have been known to aid in functions like muscle maintenance and recovery, joint health and mental alertness. However, supplements are along the same line as whole foods because they both supply nutrients to the body. Whole foods and supplements do extraordinary things for everyone. Whole foods are dominantly consumed, while supplements are used only to fill voids. Unfortunately, some become so fascinated with supplements that they lose sight of the joys of real food. The key is to give your body the nutrients it needs in the most organic and efficient way possible. You must decide what that entails.

To supplement anything is to compensate for a deficiency. This is a concept that many people don't grasp. Essentially, the purpose of taking supplements is to ensure that the body is getting the proper amounts of nutrients. Supplements are used to pick up where whole foods leave off or otherwise replace them. The best way to get both micro and macronutrients is from whole foods; it is not always that easy though. Because some people have strict diets and allergic reactions to certain foods, they must use supplements to substitute for the nutrients present in the foods they are missing out on. On average, people spend \$30-\$60 a month on supplements, while some spend upwards of \$250 a month. If this is not an indication of excessive supplementation, I don't know what is.

Do I Need Supplements?

One of the most frustrating things that I see people do is take supplements purely because they have a want for them. Taking supplements just because you want to try them is the equivalent of seeing how long you can go without sleep – it's often anti-climatic and pointless. If randomly and unnecessarily taken, supplements can be a waste of money and body function. It is not uncommon for consumers to take a supplement primarily because of fancy packaging and advertising by supplement companies. Do not get sucked into false claims, do your preparation and research before you start taking any supplements. Researching supplements can be both self-gratifying and proactive towards your results.

Another reason people unnecessarily take supplements is by word of mouth or peer recommendation. Most likely your friend at the gym that told you about the hottest new supplement on the market is not qualified to make such a recommendation. When it comes to supplementation, trust experts not friends. If you are reluctant to seek the advice of an expert, there is one primary alternative.

It can be difficult to decide whether you are in need of certain supplements, but one good way to assess whether there is a nutrient deficiency is by investigating whether you have deficiency symptoms. In other words, if you experience reoccurring symptoms in your body, you may not be getting enough of a certain nutrient. If you find yourself constantly getting sick, this could be related to a deficiency in antioxidants, which can be corrected by taking sup-

plements like Vitamin C or a Multi-Vitamin. Another example would be if you find yourself losing excessive weight with constant injury and muscle soreness, this could be an indication that you have a deficiency of protein in your diet. Discovering a nutrient deficiency is the easiest process used to pick supplements. It can be somewhat unclear, but if you can prevent a deficiency your body will reward you with lasting health and function.

I mentioned previously, you should not take supplements just because you have a want to try them. I realize that this can be hard to do. Supplements can have an addictive effect, especially when you start seeing results. Never take a supplement, or anything for that matter that you do not know the effects of. However, if you feel that trying a supplement will in some way be of benefit to yourself than go ahead, but do research to educate yourself and consult a qualified professional before starting any supplement plan. I will not advocate reckless and uneducated supplement usage, but if you are smart about supplementation it can be very beneficial.

How Much Should I Take?

A big mistake that consumers make with supplementation is taking excessive amounts. This is typically done after relying on the package's dosage recommendation, just because a supplement company puts a dosage on their packaging does not mean that you have to follow it. In fact, it is actually good to second-guess their recommendation, as the government does not regulate most supplement companies. Supplement



companies are just like any other company; they are out to make a profit. The faster you use their product they sooner you will buy more, so it would make sense if they recommended an elevated dosage.

The most commonly consumed and subsequently mistaken supplement is protein. Many people automatically assume they need a protein supplement when in fact they are getting plenty of protein in their diet from whole foods. Taking one protein shake a day or even two will not kill you, however, you might be wasting money. If you do need a scoop of protein powder to ensure proper daily protein consumption it is best to be smart about your consumption. Just because the protein label says take 60 grams of protein powder a day does not mean that it is best for you and your body. If you do indeed need that much protein supplemented, I would suggest breaking up your consumption, so you are not ingesting it all at once. Our bodies can only digest and absorb a certain amount of protein at a time and just because a bodybuilder or power lifter's body can consume 60 grams at once does not mean it is the same for everyone. A good method of figuring your appropriate daily consumption of protein is to use the recommended dietary allowance (RDA), which for most is 0.8g/bodyweight (kg). However, it varies based on the individual. This measurement should be increased with a person's exercise and activity level.

Conclusion

Essentially, whole foods and supplements serve the same purpose just in different forms. They both nourish the body. There are positives and negatives to both; it is up to you to decide which combination of whole foods and supplements you want to consume. Whole foods have advantages like taste and convenience; they have disadvantages like shopping time and higher expense. Supplements have advantages like precise measurements and little or no calories. But they have disadvantages like bad taste, fillers or additives and messiness. Now that you have seen both sides of the supplementation debate, the choice is yours. **■**