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Dietary Supplements: Good or Bad?

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Dietary supplements are supposed to add nutrients to your diet and lower your risk of health problems, but do they really and are they necessary for you?

The best nutrients come from fresh, natural foods. When we eat enough fruits and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains, and yogurt, there is little need for supplements. In fact, supplements are often processed through the body without much benefit, and some affect medicines we are already taking. However, around age 50 the body begins to lose its ability to naturally absorb certain nutrients. This is why as we age, keeping certain supplements in mind is important:

- **Calcium** - keeps bones and teeth strong, and helps prevent fractures and osteoporosis. You can get your 1,200 mg/day from milk, yogurt, cheese, soy beans, broccoli, kale and spinach.
- **Vitamin D** – allows calcium to protect your bones. Find it in 10-15 minutes of sun exposure or fortified milk products and cereals. If you are on certain weight loss or corticosteroid medications talk to your doctor because they can reduce your absorption of Vitamin D.
- **Vitamin B12** - helps keep your cells healthy. Find it in protein such as fish, meat, poultry and eggs or milk.
- **Vitamin B6** - is essential for different bodily systems. Different proteins such as beans, meat, poultry, and fish contain Vitamin B6.
- **Magnesium** - Older adults need 320-420 mg/day, which can come from green vegetables and whole grains. Certain diuretics, anti-neoplastic drugs, and antibiotics cause an excessive loss of magnesium, so talk to your doctor if you could be at a risk for deficiency.
- **Antioxidants** - are natural substances found in foods that protect you from disease and help prevent cell damage. They include Vitamin C, Beta-Carotene, Selenium and Vitamin E. Colorful fruits and veggies, nuts and olive oils are good sources. Frequently taking aspirin can lower your Vitamin C levels, so if you take aspirin daily talk to your doctor.

Since supplements are not considered medicines by the FDA, they do not regularly test them for safety. It is always best to check with your doctor or dietician before starting a supplement. Just because something is “natural” does not mean it is good for you, so always use caution before taking supplements.

With so many medications, pills, and perhaps a few vitamins and supplements, it can be difficult to keep track of them all! The Office on Aging has medication cases with compartments for each day of the week, morning, noon, and night. Come into the office today to receive your free organizer, or call the helpful and friendly Information Specialists at **1-800-510-2020** or **714-567-7500** for more information.