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Using Whole-Food Supplements in Clinical Nutrition

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As vitamins are only a small part of the nutritional healing picture, I have over several years converted my nutritional practice from using isolated and synthetic supplements to using whole-food supplements.

Although there is always much debate about which supplements are best, owing to the large numbers of companies selling them, they are different. Whether one supplement is better than another amounts to the particular physician's goals, naturalist philosophy and food research data.

A whole-food supplement, is one comprised of foods (not extracts, but entire foods) that have been concentrated into supplemental form. Isolated supplements are singular (or groups of individual) vitamins, minerals and/or amino acids. Whole foods contain vitamins, but vitamins never contain the rest of the whole-food "complex."

According to Vic Shayne, PhD, author of *Whole Food Nutrition: The Missing Link in Vitamin Therapy*, "Vitamins never exist in isolation, but rather within an interwoven complex of food nutrients and substances along with myriad cofactors and synergists." For instance, a vitamin A supplement is usually vitamin A palmitate, a synthetic form of vitamin A. Or, the supplement may consist of beta carotene, an isolated precursor to vitamin A. Conversely, a whole-food supplement contains the food(s) which not only consists of vitamin A, but particularly vitamin A1; vitamin A2; retino; retinal; retinoic acid; carotenes (there are more than 500 carotenoids in nature); essential fatty acids; fiber; grass factors; pigments; natural sugars; minerals (such as zinc and copper); lipids; bioflavonoids; and nutrients that fall under the broad spectrum of "phytochemicals," ranging from terpenes to isoflavones. Doctors using whole-food supplements in their nutritional practices look not only for vitamins, but, more importantly, rely on these cofactors to bring the body back into biochemical balance. Ultimately, whole-food supplements provide the "chemical" part of the equation needed to meet the needs of the subluxation complex (chemical, physical, mental) taught as a fundamental of chiropractic.

Many biochemical researchers, nutritionists and herbalists have noted that without the whole-food complex, the body will never achieve whole nutrition, as vitamin supplements lack the rest of the complex. Richard Murray,DC, an avid biochemical researcher and lecturer for the past 30 years, taught that isolated vitamins eventually lead to biochemical imbalances and consequential nutritional deficiencies, as the body is forced to surrender its stores of nutrients in order to make any isolated vitamin work. Dr. Murray went so far as to state that the use of isolated/synthetic vitamins amounts to the practice of "chemistry," wherein the use of whole-food supplements translates into the practice of biochemistry. Whole foods are alive with enzyme activity, while isolated vitamins are not living substances in the least. Vitamins do not resemble foods, but they resemble parts of foods. It is the rest of the food complex - the other parts - in which proponents of whole foods are interested. Retired USDA botanist, James Duke,PhD, author of *The Green Pharmacy*, agrees: "Vitamins and phytochemicals are better taken in their evolutionary context - as they occur in plants - not isolated and out of context." Although it is true that isolated vitamin supplementation "works," we must define the word "work."

Certainly, experiments have shown the efficacy of vitamins against symptomatology, but some experts claim that this is a matter of practicing pharmacology, not nutrition. Nutrition relates to nourishment by foods, not isolated chemicals. Whole foods work biochemically and harmoniously, while isolated vitamins always run the risk of creating biochemical imbalances. When speaking of minerals, there is the added risk of toxicity, as minerals must enjoy a biochemical balance to promote health. Zinc; copper; iron; calcium; magnesium; phosphorus; and other minerals are easily upset and offset by an improper ratio of minerals in the body. Taking isolated minerals and mineral toddies, even in a multivitamin/mineral supplement, is a biochemical risk. Too much magnesium or phosphorus may imbalance calcium; too much copper may imbalance vitamin C; zinc; manganese; molybdenum; vitamin B6; and iron; too much zinc can lead to copper deficiency, and so on. Because nutrients in foods are balanced within the food complex, the risk of toxicity is very low.

Conversely, trying to balance the body's biochemistry with mineral and vitamin supplements is very difficult because of the dynamic complexity of the human organism; the daily diet; exposure to environmental poisons; stress factors; genetics, etc. If my patient needs minerals, I use a whole-food complex supplement containing a multitude of plant foods known to be mineral-rich, and also include synergistic vitamins; amino acids; trace mineral activators; and enzymes. I have found that nature's design is a safer choice due its inherent intelligence in providing a variety of nutrients, synergists and low dosages.

When using whole-food supplements, doctors must realize a paradigm shift and the need to stop regarding foods as chemicals. We have to give up the reductionist line of thinking and grasp the holistic perspective, understanding that the "more is better" attitude does not apply to food; vitamins; minerals; or amino acids. The quality of the food complex becomes more important than the quantity of individual vitamins, minerals or amino acids.

As with all supplements, buyer beware. If you don't read and understand what's on a supplement label, then you may be contradicting yourself to your patients. The truth is that many companies tout their products as whole foods when they're offering mixtures of foods along with isolates. And some so-called "whole-food" supplements are not grown in soil, under natural, traditional farming conditions. The way to tell the difference is rather simple: A whole food is just that - a food like a carrot, beet, celery or potato flour, for instance. Isolates are stated on the label by their chemical names, such as vitamin A palmitate; mixed tocopherols; ascorbic acid; pyridoxine; niacin; niacinamide; etc.

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