

vitamins &

Confused about what vitamins and minerals to take? Erin Craven gets some valuable advice from the professionals





what the experts take

take a look at the supplement shelves in your supermarket, health-food shop or pharmacy, and it's easy to see why many of us end up being totally confused by the huge variety of vitamins and minerals on offer. Of course, we can hedge our bets and simply opt for a multivitamin hoping it will do the job. But if we need something more specific, or something for a particular problem, making the right choice of vitamin or mineral can be a real minefield. So, we decided to put seven health experts on the spot, and asked them ... "If you could take just one single supplement, what would it be?"

the dietitian

Sydney-based Geraldine Georgeou runs her own practice, and has assisted many organisations, including the CSIRO, with advice on dietary issues.

I would choose a folate supplement, which most women only really think about taking when they're pregnant. I tend to use this as a vitamin for the general population – you need 800mg a day of folate, and most of us don't get that in our diets. We don't really put much focus on folate, except during pregnancy, but it is important as it helps regulate homocysteine levels – high homocysteine levels are a big factor when it comes to heart disease.

Because folate is so well associated with pregnancy, it can be pretty embarrassing to tell a guy to take it!

I'm also more likely to choose a product from Blackmores, because it is Australian made, and because it puts a lot of research into its products. I would also recommend Elevit (a folate supplement made by Roche), as a lot of research has also gone into it.

the trainer

Donna Jones is GoodMedicine's Fitness Editor and a qualified personal trainer. She is also a former national-level competitive track and field athlete.

In times of stress when everything is busy, I like to take a B-complex supplement, or a Berocca (a well-known vitamin B and C supplement made by Roche). When I was training intensively we had a cocktail of vitamins and supplements, and I became quite confused about what to take and when. It was 'this vitamin in the morning, this supplement 15 minutes after training, and this one when you go to sleep'. I couldn't keep up, so now I believe in keeping it simple.

You have to remember that anything in excess of what your body needs, your body just gets rid of ... and that includes protein supplements for muscle recovery and growth. The average person only needs 0.8g of protein per kilo of body weight. This increases to up to 1.8g per ▶

kilo for anyone involved in heavy resistance training. Overloading on protein won't make your muscles grow any bigger!

the naturopath

Sydney-based Janelle Purcell, runs her own clinic and also has a regular naturopathy segment on the *Today* show on the Nine Network.

I would choose zinc. It's an immune booster, it's good for reproductive health, and for your hair, skin and nails. And it's fantastic for treating acne. You can get enough zinc from food, but it is easily depleted with stress, and also with smoking. I give everyone who comes to my clinic a zinc test, and I've only ever had one person who wasn't really badly deficient, and that's only because she ate heaps of oysters!

It's thought that a lot of infertility problems are caused through a lack of zinc, and I've had people come to me who have been on IVF for years, and two months later they're pregnant because I've put them on to zinc.

Prostate cancer is also a big problem with zinc deficiency, and as soon as you put people on zinc, their PSAs (prostate specific antigens) go down.

I take a liquid zinc called Zinc Drink, which you can get from health-food shops. With a liquid you absorb every bit of it, while if you have digestive problems and take a tablet, you end up urinating a lot of the zinc out.

the gp

Dr John Gullotta runs a medical practice in Sydney, and is President of the Eastern Suburbs Medical Association.

If I'm feeling a bit tired, overworked or stressed, I'll take a vitamin B complex for extra energy. Vitamin B-complex supplements include thiamine, riboflavine, niacin, vitamin



B6, folic acid, pantothenic acid, biotin and vitamin B12.

Any of the ones you can buy over the counter are okay – you don't need to go overboard – and a tablet works just as well as a vitamin B injection.

In general, though, I don't think you really need to take extra vitamins if you have a balanced diet, unless you're a pregnant woman or lactating mum. But any added vitamin B won't do any harm, as your body just gets rid of any excess.

the women's health expert

Sarah Hardy is Director of The Jean Hailes Foundation Education Unit in Melbourne.

I take a calcium citrate supplement. Depending on her age bracket, a woman needs between 1000-1500mg of calcium per day, so for me, taking



a calcium supplement is all about topping up my diet. There are a lot of calcium supplements on the market, and calcium citrate is the best form that people can take – apart from getting it in their diet, of course. To be honest, some of the other forms of calcium don't work.

Of course, calcium is important for preventing osteoporosis, and once women hit menopause calcium supplements are most important. With my work at Jean Hailes I spend a lot of time educating people about osteoporosis, so it's definitely a case of practising what I preach.

the stress expert

Dr Phillip Harker is a psychologist and adjunct senior lecturer in applied psychology with the School of Education and Professional Studies at Queensland's Griffith University.

When I'm feeling a little bit tired I'll take an essential trace element such as chromium or zinc. And I can't

believe how much better I feel after taking one. Often people who are stressed don't have the right balance of minerals, so in terms of a pill that can help treat the physical effects of stress, a good quality essential trace element seems to really help. I'm not exactly sure why that helps (I'm a doctor of psychology, not medicine) but from articles I've read, and from what I've done myself, it seems to be one of the most marked things to make sure the system is okay.

the heart expert

Cardiologist Dr Ross Walker is the author of many books including *Highway To Heart Health – Antioxidants And You* (Kingsclear Books, \$16.95).

I take a few different vitamins every day, but if I had to choose just one, I would say a natural form of vitamin E. I take 500 units of vitamin E every day, but it doesn't really work without vitamin C. When you're sourcing vitamin E, make sure it's the natural form and not synthetic, which is the cheap stuff and very ineffective. If the label says D-Alpha, you're looking at the natural form. That's the best cardiac anti-oxidant.

And it's a fat-soluble vitamin, so it coats bad cholesterol and stops it from getting into your arteries.

Many conservative doctors say you don't need to take vitamins at all, and if you lived in a completely natural world where you weren't exposed to synthetic poisons and stress, then you would get all the vitamins you needed from food. But in our synthetic world we are creating so many more free radicals, and the only way to combat those is to take extra doses of anti-oxidants and vitamins. ◊