

Fact sheet - vitamins and minerals

Vitamins are metabolic catalysts that regulate biochemical reactions within your body. Your body cannot manufacture them, which is why you must obtain them through your diet. To date, 13 vitamins have been discovered, each with a specific function. You need vitamins to function properly, but any excess offers no improvement in body function. Vitamins are required in tiny amounts for growth, health and physical well-being.

Most people use vitamin supplements in their diets but despite claims to the contrary, supplements will not:

- enhance performance
- increase strength or endurance
- prevent injuries or illness
- provide energy
- build muscle

Minerals are present in all living cells. They occur freely in nature in the soil and water and travel through the food chain by being absorbed into plants that grow in the soil and then into the animals that consume the plants and water. Vegetables of the same species can differ in mineral content, depending on the soil in which they were grown and each mineral has its own unique role in the body.

You need some minerals in large amounts: sodium, potassium, chloride, calcium, phosphorous and magnesium. Others, such as iron, zinc, selenium and iodine are needed in smaller amounts. As with vitamins, you can get the minerals you need if you eat a variety of wholesome foods. Iron and zinc can be exceptions to that general rule, particularly for those who abstain from red meat; the same is true of calcium for those who abstain from dairy products.

Vitamin and mineral deficiencies tend to be related to medical problems so for the average healthy person when it comes to nourishing the body, always try to get your vitamins and minerals you need from the food you eat; food first! If for psychological health insurance you wish to supplement your diet, you can take a single one-a-day type multivitamin.