

If you are reading this column (a new addition to *Around DB* for 2018), it's likely that you are already proactive about wellness. Let's assume, you eat your fruit and vegetables, watch your sugar and alcohol intake, stay well hydrated and get plenty of sleep. Why then, do you need to concern yourself with nutritional supplements?

Opening the discussion, Graeme Bradshaw draws attention to *The First Hong Kong Total Diet Study Report No. 9*, published in December 2014, which revealed that, despite many of our best efforts, the Hong Kong diet leaves a lot to be desired.

"The report showed that not only are we deficient in vitamins, but only 3% of us consume the recommended WHO intake of calcium, just 20% get enough iron and only 35% enough magnesium," Graeme says. "We are also low on zinc, manganese and potassium, with only around 30% of us displaying internationally accepted levels."

You are what you eat

A quick Google search will reveal the long-term effects vitamin and mineral deficiency can have on your health – consider that insufficient calcium intake alone is associated with a long list of medical disorders, including osteoporosis, osteoarthritis, cardiovascular disease, colon cancer, diabetes and obesity. But the question is, why is your diet not delivering enough nutrients? For the answer to that, you have to look beyond your own kitchen and consider the bigger picture.

"Getting your nutrition only from conventionally grown food fails to provide your body with all the nutrients it needs to operate disease free," says Graeme. "Consider



Graeme Bradshaw takes omega 3, curcumin, a multivitamin and a probiotic every day

THE CASE FOR Supplements

To optimise your vitamin and mineral intake, you need to look beyond your diet. *Ray Robertson* consults Graeme Bradshaw, IMI's founding director and naturopath

the way modern farming methods deplete the soil of minerals without replacing them. All vegetables need minerals, and if the soil isn't replenished with a mineral-rich fertiliser, then the plants, as well as the farm animals that feed off them, become deficient."

Long-term food storage, processing and the addition of preservatives also degrades the

nutrient content of food. One solution would be to eat only fresh, organic food, which contains 30% more minerals and 80% more anti-oxidants than conventionally grown food, but that's not always possible due to financial or logistical reasons.

What's more, to obtain optimum levels of calcium, magnesium and potassium, you'd need to ▶

eat five servings of fresh, organic vegetables a day, along with whole grains, nuts and seeds. "That is a quadrupling of the amounts of vegetables and seeds eaten on average," says Graeme. "Who could really do that in their health quest? It's possible, but not likely."

The fact that most foods don't yield sufficient nutrients is compounded because, nowadays, to stay healthy, we need more nutrients than ever before. The modern food supply is contaminated with pesticides, herbicides and chemicals, and we also have to contend with environmental contaminants in the water and air, such as carbon monoxide, lead and mercury. All this increases our need for vitamins and minerals because our metabolisms and immune systems are under constant attack.

Supplements you need to take

While there's no single 'fix-all' supplement, Graeme recommends – and takes – four core supplements daily. The first is a multivitamin powder drink. The second is omega 3, which boosts the cardiovascular system, reduces inflammation, and is an essential for concentration, mood balance and supple skin. The third is a probiotic to boost the immune and digestive systems. "A probiotic will half the number of times you fall ill – it's really worth taking, just to be well for more days of the year," says Graeme.

The fourth supplement Graeme swears by is curcumin (turmeric extract). "This universally beneficial anti-oxidant protects the heart, brain, joints and all the key organs that we want to be

functioning well as we age," he says. "By reducing inflammation in the key organs, curcumin ensures they last longer."

Growing children need a daily multivitamin to support healthy brain and bone formation, and they also benefit from a daily dose of omega 3 and a probiotic. "With children the goal is to target any deficiencies, and work on improving their knowledge about good nutrition," Graeme says.

"Be aware that not a lot happens immediately on a supplement programme; a few symptoms drop



away and you feel better more often, and you fall ill less often – and that's about it," he adds. "It's more about what doesn't happen – disease."

Avoid a DIY approach

Do a little online research and you can get a rough idea of which supplements you need. Smokers and diabetics will reach for the vitamin C; women who menstruate heavily will turn to iron. However, Graeme warns against a DIY approach.

"You are best to have regular blood checks that monitor your nutrient levels, so you know exactly which supplements to take," he says. "Also, blood tests may show excess levels, which can be harmful. For instance, overloading on iron can lead to liver disease, heart problems and diabetes."

Graeme advises that you consult a qualified naturopath – not a dietician. "Dieticians are good at constructing certain diets, but their training tells them that you can get all the nutrients you need from an average diet," he says. "The fact is this is not true, as the 2014 Hong Kong study shows."

Importantly too, not all supplements are created equal, so it's wise to seek advice. "I see a lot of people who have made bad choices," Graeme says. "They've either bought cheap and ineffective brands or the wrong supplements for their needs."

Graeme recommends whole-food supplements as they are derived from real food and offer superior bioavailability. For example, vitamin C is more active as an antioxidant when provided with flavonoid cofactors, found in whole-food supplements made from oranges, acerola and high phenolic food concentrates.

It's true that quality supplements don't come cheap but, these days, neither does nutrition-rich food. Take salmon, for instance – it is better for you to supplement with a high-grade fish oil than to eat 'cheap' farmed fish, which is low in omega-3 and high in toxins.

So there you have it – the case for supplements. Getting your nutrition only from food is a bad idea. **B**

To make these tips practical, you can find an exhaustive range of recommended supplements at the Integrated Medicine Institute in Discovery Bay or Central. For more information, visit www.imi.com.hk.

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