



## Supplement vs. food: Where should you be getting your vitamins?

BY DR. JULIE T. CHEN

I recently heard that everyone should be on a vitamin C supplement, but I want to know if I can get enough via my foods. Please clarify for me!

**V**ITAMIN C is important in many functions in our body. It helps to support our immune and cardiovascular systems, maintain skin health, improve mood and healing after trauma or infection, and provide added health support in special circumstances like combating cancers.

So, how much vitamin C do we need and where should we get it from?

For those of us who eat a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, nuts and whole grains, vitamin C is likely to be abundant in our diet. If you are not eating a lot of these foods, ask yourself: Why not? The fact is that you should be. Second of all, if you are not getting it in your foods, you can supplement with a vitamin tablet but please be aware that our body always does better when we get our nutrients from foods.

In general, I use supplements as a gap-filler. The foundation of a healthy well-balanced diet is the most important. For many of us, we may still need supplements to fill the gaps of what we are not absorbing from our foods, but the supplements should be used as such—gap filler and not as a major food group.

So, eat a medley of fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts and whole grains and then if you have many of the health issues I mentioned above, you may want to consider supplementing vitamin C at 500–1000 mg/day. If you need a higher dosage for a specific health reason, please check with your doctor first before taking it to make sure the dosing is appropriate for you.

There is one caveat I want you to pay attention to in regards to consuming foods rich in vitamin C. A lot of my patients in my clinic of integrative medicine in San Jose, CA try to get their vitamin C and other vitamins only through fruit juices. You should be aware that fruit juices typically are high in sugars.

If that is the only way you are getting your vitamins, you need to make sure that you have your blood sugar level checked by your



doctor as well as your triglycerides to make sure that you are not overdoing it. If your blood sugar or triglycerides are elevating, you need to cut back on your fruit and fruit juice intake and try to get most of your vitamin C through vegetables such as broccoli and red peppers, to name just two options.

Ultimately, I always tell my patients that if you could just eat a lot of different coloured vegetables at every meal, you'll be able to take the guesswork out of getting your necessary vitamins and minerals. By eating this way, you'll be able to naturally consume many of the vitamins and minerals Mother Nature intended for us to have to keep our body running optimally. **Z**

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