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## Supplements

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## fact sheet

In this section you will learn about the commonly known micronutrients. There is a lot of advertising by supplement manufacturers to try to convince you that taking supplements is vital to your health or will make you slim.

If you eat a balanced diet with lots of vegetables and fruit, you should not become deficient in any vitamins or minerals. However, as discussed in this section, vitamin and mineral supplements may sometimes be required when you are actively trying to lose weight and eating fewer kilojoules than your body needs, i.e. during your initial weight loss period.

Many foods have added vitamins and minerals (i.e. are fortified), so becoming deficient is usually quite difficult. There are several categories of people that could become vitamin or mineral deficient, including alcoholics, drug addicts, elderly people, sick people and long-term malnourished people such as those with anorexia nervosa. Overweight people, unless the diet is completely devoid of fruit and vegetables, should never risk becoming deficient in any micronutrients.

### 1. Vitamins

Vitamins are one of the essential micronutrients that your body needs to maintain its functions. Vitamin deficiencies were once very common and disorders such as beri-beri and scurvy were caused by people not having access to fresh fruits and vegetables. Today, vitamin deficiencies have become a rare occurrence in western societies and are usually only seen in select groups and sometimes newborn babies.

Vitamin and mineral deficiencies are caused by eating too little food as well as the wrong foods. Even if you reduce your kilojoule intake, you should still obtain more than enough vitamins in your diet. This is because many foods today are fortified with micronutrients. However there may be times when you need to take a vitamin or mineral supplement. There are two groups of vitamins—the fat-soluble and the water-soluble—and these names relate primarily to the way that the body absorbs, processes and stores these vitamins. More information on water- and fat-soluble vitamins can be found in Bernard's book, *Healthy Intentions: Make it a Habit*.

### 2. Minerals

Minerals are a range of chemical elements that have different functions in your body. Many of these functions still need to be fully investigated, but it seems very unlikely that they would help or hinder your weight loss. The nutritional minerals are the chemical elements that are found in the ash after the body or food is burnt. It is possible to become deficient in some of these elements in vegetarian-type diets or a poor diet in general and supplements may be needed in these cases.

### 3. Weight-loss supplements

The search for effective weight-loss drugs continues, but to date there are no overwhelmingly effective treatments for weight loss. Pharmaceutical drugs that you buy on prescription from your doctor go through rigorous scientific research and testing before being released and most of the claims that the pharmaceutical companies make, although sometimes exaggerated, can usually be substantiated.

This is not the case for the supplements and weight-loss pills that you buy over the counter from your pharmacy or local health food store. Usually they do not have to go through any sort of scientific tests to be marketed, and the manufacturers do not have to substantiate their claims.

Despite this lack of evidence, and even in the presence of evidence for little or no effectiveness, people keep buying weight-loss pills in the hope that they may help. It is easier to hope for the quick fix than it is to put in the hard work it takes to lose weight. Weight loss is difficult; it requires effort and determination and there is a high level of failure. So manufacturers of these weight-loss supplements capitalise on desperate people who want an easy way out. But at this stage there is no easy way out.

There are no supplements that have any dramatic effect on weight loss. The only supplements that have been shown to have any effect in scientific research are capsaicin (a bitter component found in capsicums), caffeine (i.e. in coffee) and fibre. However, the effects of many of these supplements is mild.

## **Why vitamins and micronutrients are sometimes important in weight loss**

Although vitamins and various supplements do not cause you to lose weight, there are still reasons why you should still consider taking them. When starting your weight-loss program, you need by necessity a smaller food intake than your body requires. As you reduce the amount of food that you eat it will mean that you also reduce your daily supply of vitamins and minerals.

Vitamins and minerals are vital for your health and wellbeing and they do not contain any kilojoules so they do not contribute to weight gain. While you are trying to lose weight it is important to maintain an adequate vitamin and mineral intake. There are other proven benefits of vitamins, such as folate in pregnancy and glucosamine for helping joints.

In this section of the website I will systematically go through the vitamins, minerals and supplements that are available. I will attempt to provide a balanced view without bias so that you can make up your own mind regarding the available evidence. If I feel that a vitamin, mineral or supplement has a specific proven price I will provide it on this web site. I have personally reviewed the evidence for all of the supplements that are available for sale on this website. You can be sure that you both value for money and a scientifically proven product.