

Healthy Lifestyle Awareness Month



This month is Healthy Lifestyle Awareness Month and is a month in the health calendar that highlights the importance of healthy living through nutrition. The body needs a minimum amount of vitamins and minerals each day to remain healthy and function properly and it is important to know how to fuel your body so that you get the right nutrients.

Vitamins and minerals are substances that are essential in certain quantities for growth and development. Most of them cannot be manufactured by the body, and must come from our diet or other supplementary forms. Vitamin supplements can serve as 'buffers' in the event that your diet does not meet your daily requirements fully.

Vitamins and minerals are essential to any diet, and research suggests that they prevent cancer and heart disease as well as various other health problems. Proper food consumption should be accompanied by the right vitamins and minerals, to allow your body to carry out day-to-day functions in its optimum form.

Beneficial vitamins and minerals

- **Vitamin A**

Vitamin A helps cell reproduction and stimulates immunity. It also helps with vision and promotes bone growth, as well as helping to maintain healthy skin, hair, and mucous membranes. It is found in tomatoes, carrots, spinach, pumpkin seeds, sweet potato, and oranges.

- **B Vitamins**

These vitamins help the process your body uses to get or make energy from the food you eat. B vitamins also help with the formation of red blood cells. B Vitamins are found in peas, watermelons, bananas, potatoes, peanuts, and green peppers.

- **Vitamin C**

This is one of the most important vitamins. It plays a significant role as an antioxidant, thereby protecting body tissue from the damage of oxidation. Vitamin C is abundant in oranges, guavas, apples, cucumbers, cauliflower, and asparagus.

- **Vitamin D**

Vitamin D is known as the 'sunshine vitamin' since it is manufactured by the body after being exposed to sunshine. It is vital to the human body as it promotes absorption of calcium and magnesium, which are essential for the normal development of healthy teeth and bones. Apart from sunlight, vitamin D is found in salmon, tuna, milk, cod liver oil, salami, and some fortified cereals.

- **Vitamin E**

Like vitamin C, vitamin E plays a significant role as an antioxidant, protecting body tissue from the damage of oxidation. It is also important for the formation of red blood cells. Vitamin E is present in blackberries, bananas, kiwi fruit, almonds, spinach, and sunflower seeds.

- **Calcium**

Calcium is one of the most important minerals in the body. Our bodies need calcium to maintain the healthy formation of bones and teeth. Calcium is also important for other functions such as muscle contraction and the prevention of osteoporosis. Milk, yoghurt, cheese, salmon, tofu, and baked beans are all good sources of calcium.



- **Iron**

Iron is critical for the proper functioning of red blood cells and the prevention of anaemia. Iron helps our cells 'breathe' and works with protein to make haemoglobin in red blood cells. Haemoglobin carries oxygen to all parts of the body so it can perform its normal functions. Liver, giblets, oysters, soybeans, sesame seeds, and pumpkin seeds all have a high iron content.

- **Magnesium**

Magnesium helps with the formation of bones and teeth, and assists the absorption of calcium and potassium. Where calcium stimulates the muscles, magnesium is used to relax the muscles. It is further needed for cellular metabolism and the production of energy. Magnesium is found in bran (rice, wheat, and oat), molasses, sunflower and sesame seeds, pumpkin, and dried herbs.

Symptoms of deficiency

Symptoms of a deficiency in vitamins and minerals usually appear when the lack is already at a relatively advanced stage. For instance, people who do not have enough vitamin A or B vitamins suffer from recurring tiredness, mental or emotional disturbances, loss of appetite, chapped lips, and so on.

The common causes of these vitamin deficiencies include poor eating habits, alcoholism, emotional stress, the improper absorption of vitamins and minerals (usually due to liver or intestinal disorders), the intake of medicines that interfere with the ingestion of vitamins, and lack of exposure to sunlight.

Guidelines for taking vitamin or mineral supplements

Before supplementing your diet with any vitamins or minerals, you should consult a doctor. A doctor will be able to recommend a multivitamin instead of a supplement that only contains one vitamin or the exact minerals that you require, or are lacking.

It is important to note that some people should not take supplements if they have been diagnosed with certain medical conditions. For example, people with kidney problems are often advised against taking magnesium.

Although supplementary vitamins and minerals may be helpful, no supplement will replace the value of a healthy diet. Most major medical establishments recommend that healthy adults get their vitamins and minerals from food rather than relying solely on supplements.