

Supplements for Seniors?

Nutrition Notes by Natalie

Last month during a site visit, a Cameron Park participant asked me to speak about whether or not supplements are good for seniors and if so which ones? It sparked a conversation amongst the group and I found myself not only excited about the topic, but I had several seniors tell me they were too! Many of you approached me afterwards asking if I could create a handout to help them remember all the specifics about this topic. Well here you go!

First and foremost I want to begin by saying, I am definitely not a supplement booster! I believe that you should seek to consume whole foods to meet your dietary needs. There are times, however, when our needs are greater than the foods we eat are able to provide. Dietary intolerances or restrictions may not allow us to consume enough of a particular nutrient to meet basic needs, or our health requires us to take certain medications that affect our ability to absorb sufficient amounts of a particular nutrient. It is in these cases that supplements can play a vital role in maintaining health. There are a lot of supplements out there, so I had to narrow it down. The following are the top three supplements I would recommend.

Omega-3s Fatty Acids are essential to good health but the true health benefits come from a diet balanced in Omega 3 and Omega 6 fatty acids. Unfortunately, the modern American diet is way out of balance. You see, Omega 3s are anti-inflammatory while Omega 6s are what we call pro-inflammatory. While both play a key role in overall health, overconsumption of one over the other is not good. As Americans, we consume mostly Omega 6 fatty acids, with very low levels of Omega 3s. To tip the scale in the right direction, we need to reduce our intake of processed foods and increase our consumption of fatty fish like salmon, mackerel, and herring to at least twice a week while also adding plant-based Omega 3s like walnuts, flaxseed, and canola oil on a daily basis. If you do not eat this way, you may want to consider

a daily Omega 3 supplement of 250-500 mg of combined EPA and DHA.

Vitamin D which incidentally is not really a vitamin, but rather a hormone, is responsible for maintaining bone health and reducing inflammation. Contrary to popular belief, getting enough sunshine doesn't appear to meet the needs of the population. In fact, most of us need to supplement with at least 1000 IU daily. Before starting a supplement, have your doctor check your levels with a simple blood test to establish a baseline. If your levels are low, you may need to take more than a standard dose, but if you are within range this daily amount should allow you to maintain your levels.

B-12 is a water soluble vitamin linked to cognitive health and blood health. As we age, our body's acid content decreases and hence our ability to digest and absorb all the nutrients, like B-12, from our foods. Taking acid reducing medications and a vegetarian lifestyle (especially vegan) also puts seniors at risk for developing B-12 deficiency. A simple blood test can tell your doctor if you are deficient. Supplements can be taken orally or sublingually (under the tongue) and it is generally well absorbed. If you are extremely deficient your doctor might administer a monthly shot of B-12 in his office.

So schedule an appointment with your doctor and have your B-12 and Vitamin D levels tested. If they are in an acceptable range, you eat a fatty fish at least twice a week, and you get a daily dose of walnuts or flaxseed oil on your morning bowl of oatmeal, congratulations! You likely will do just fine without these supplements. But, for those of us that dislike fish, take antacids on a regular basis, or just don't maintain adequate Vitamin D levels, you may find these supplements beneficial. As with anything, consult your healthcare provider before starting any new supplement to ensure your health and safety. 😊

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