



EXPENSIVE MOUTHFUL: Unless you are ill, elderly or pregnant, you could just be overloading your liver by taking too many vitamin supplements

Save on buying those vitamins

Healthy diet more beneficial, experts advise

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PHARMACY and shop shelves are stacked with rows of vitamin pills promising a veritable arsenal of silver bullets for everything – from staying young to feeling good – but also beg the question: Are we overdosing on vitamins?

Tomorrow is the start of national nutrition week – a gentle reminder to all to have another look at their diets and make sure they are getting all the nutrients, vitamins and minerals they need.

Netcare Greenacres Hospital's dietician Dorothea McDonald said her immediate answer to the question whether modern man was taking too many vitamins was a resounding "yes".

"People reach for the 'magic bullets' of supplementation very unwisely [mostly on hearsay] and try them in an attempt to correct unhealthy eating behaviours, while mostly continuing with their bad eating habits," she said.

MacDonald said anybody who followed a balanced diet should not need any supplements.

"Your diet will then provide all your nutrients, given there are no special circumstances, for example, pregnancy, extreme exercise and so on.

"No vitamin pill contains everything, therefore it cannot replace a healthy diet.

"A good daily meal plan should provide all the food groups in the recommended quantities, which will differ from person to person, age-group to age-group, and level of activity you are involved with and so on."

MacDonald said there were some circumstances when people should, however, start using supplements.

Vitamins should be used "when there is a specific need for supplements, for example during pregnancy, when the body's requirements are increased.

"Very active people who cannot meet all their needs through diet [should supplement with vitamins] – and I am not referring to sport supplements here.

"[And] the elderly might need a good multi-vitamin/mineral purely because they cannot manage the volume of food required anymore.

"People who have a chronic illness might also have to use supplements.

"Here it is very important that someone knowledgeable guides you, as many over-the-counter supplements can interfere with the medication you are taking," she said.

"A word of warning," MacDonald said, was to "be very careful if you supplement, not to supple-

ment single nutrients as it can disturb the balance of nutrients in the body, and never to supplement more than the levels indicated on the label as the maximum daily amount needed".

Some nutrients can reach toxic levels if taken in excess of the body's requirement, she said.

"Also, be careful with herbal supplements as some [even though they are considered natural] can, for example, cause a bleeding tendency, which can lead to major medical problems when taken with prescription medication or when you require surgery."

Tanya Wyatt from Happy Body agreed.

"The supplements industry is like any other – you get high quality products and low quality products.

"Unless you're buying directly from a practitioner, a health shop, or a store with very select standards for supplements, you're likely buying poor quality products that can do your liver more harm than good," she said.

Wyatt said because not all people followed the same diet, their nutritional needs differed.

"If I were pushed, I'd say a high quality Krill oil (supplying clean, sustainable omega 3 oils), vitamin D3 – particularly over the cooler months, and Vitamin C because of its immune-boosting properties," she said.