

To Your Health!

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Optimal Health through Optimal Knowledge: How to select optimal dietary supplements

We discussed Integrative medicine and introduced some discussion of supplements in our last two columns. In this column, we would like to talk about how to choose a quality supplement before going into the research on specific supplements that can be beneficial. There may be some repetition from the last column but we feel that it is very important that you are armed with tools to help you pick a supplement that will provide true benefits for you and your families before we go into detail about specific supplements.

More than 150 million Americans take a vitamin or dietary supplement daily. These include vitamins, minerals and herbs. They are marketed with promises of better health, disease fighting properties, increased energy and enhanced athletic performance to name a few. They are purchased on the internet, in health food stores and through TV ads. Most consumers purchase these products with the belief that they are safe because they don't require a prescription. They are unaware of potential risks, side effects and possible interactions with their current medications. Many do not let their health care provider know that they are taking supplements and often providers do not ask.

The supplement industry makes billions of dollars every year and many consumers spend their hard earned money blindly. These supplements are often very expensive as well as ineffective. Consumers are frequently uninformed about how to pick out a high quality supplement and sort out whether there is available evidence-based research to support the manufacturer's claims. Many products that are marketed do not have the ingredients listed on the label or have them in inadequate quantities. In our fastpaced society, many of us look for that "magic pill" that will fix whatever ails us quickly – the latest supplement that will alleviate our fatigue or help us lose weight with minimal effort on our part.

There are some very positive changes in the regulation of the supplement industry. On June 25, 2007, the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) published their final rule establishing regulations to require current good manufacturing practices (CGMP) for dietary supplements. The new rule will ensure that dietary supplements are produced in a quality manner, do not contain contaminants or impurities and are accurately labeled. Manufacturers will be required to evaluate identity, purity, strength and composition of all dietary supplements. You may have noticed GMP seal on some labels. This will take the quality up a notch and is important information

to have when you are looking for a quality supplement.

You may have also noticed the USP (United States Pharmacopoeia) seal on some supplement bottles. This seal provides assurance to the consumer that the quality and purity of the raw materials utilized are of pharmaceutical grade. The USP seal on packaging guarantees a standard of excellence that is sold only through physicians and selected pharmacies. USP now has a new dietary supplement verification program (DSVP). DSVP certification on a package or bottle signifies that the supplement has undergone rigorous independent testing by the same public health organization that has been setting medicine and dietary standards since 1820.

Dietary supplements can provide positive health benefits but it is important to educate yourself by using reliable, scientifically sound information when choosing one. Do your homework. Use caution if the supplement claims sound too good to be true. There are no magic bullets or quick fixes that will lead to optimal health. Remember that it is very important for your health care Provider to know what you are taking. It can be harmful to take supplements and not communicate that information. There are a number of good reasons to include your Provider in any information that pertains to your health.

There are good arguments supporting the benefits of supplements when certain prescription medicines are taken that can deplete essential nutrients in your body. If you drink alcohol, smoke or if you are on a diet or eat small, irregular meals you may be missing certain nutrients. Our bodies are complex and amazing. The nutrients that we take in are critical to the optimal functioning of all the systems of the body such as the immune system, nervous system, gastrointestinal system etc. We cannot survive without them and our health is compromised if we miss vital nutrients or don't take in adequate quantities.

There is a lot of good evidence-based research supporting the use of vitamins and dietary supplements but you have to make knowledgeable decisions. There are some great resources to help. Remember that it is important to get regular exercise, eat a healthy diet and find ways to reduce stress along with supplement use if your goal is to achieve optimal health.

There is some exciting information on the use of supplements, based on good research, showing health benefits when used with healthy lifestyle choices. We will look only at supplements with strong evidence of benefit. We will be sharing that information along with some complementary treatments and therapies that appear to be helpful, over the next two columns. Take the time to check out these websites. They have current, reliable information.

Medline Plus: [http://medline plus.gov/](http://medlineplus.gov/)

U.S Pharmacopoeia verified dietary supplements <http://www.usp.org>

The American Botanical Council: <http://www.herbalgram.org>

The council for responsible nutrition: www.crnusa.org

Natural medicines comprehensive database: www.naturaldatabase.com

Do you want to learn how to help fight hunger in Columbia County?

For a second year the Columbia County Commission on Children and Families (CCC-CF) is organizing a fund-raising event to benefit the Columbia Pacific Food Bank, which provides food for low-income people.

Fight hunger, promote the arts and get involved in your community. Join members of the CCCCF on Friday, March 28, from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. for a simple meal of soup and bread and keep the handcrafted bowl as a reminder of hunger in the world.

The second annual Empty Bowls event will be held at the St. Helens Senior Center, 375 S. 15th Street. A silent auction will include ceramic work by local artists, together with other items donated by merchants and individuals in the community.

Tickets are available for \$10 at Houlton Bakery, the St. Helens Book Shop and at the office of the Commission on Children and Families in the county courthouse. All proceeds will go to the Columbia Pacific Food Bank and all donations are welcome.

Soup and bread are being donated by a number of local restaurants. Pottery students at St. Helens High School and Scappoose High School have contributed bowls for this event, as have a number of professional artists. According to this year's event coordinators, Susan Easley and Joan Cisneros, "This has been a difficult year in Columbia County and has stretched the resources of the Food Bank. We are grateful for the generosity of the people in this community who support Empty Bowls and participate in our effort to raise funds to feed the hungry."

Empty Bowls started in 1990 when a high school art teacher in Michigan helped his students solve a problem. They were searching for a way to raise funds to support a food drive. What evolved was a class project to make ceramic bowls for a fund raising meal. Guests were served a simple meal of soup and bread, and were invited to keep the bowl as a reminder of hunger in the world. Since then Empty Bowls events have been held throughout the world, and millions of dollars have been raised to combat hunger.

For tickets or more information about the Empty Bowls Fundraiser, please call the CCCCF office at 503-397-7211.



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