

Health Benefits of Nutritional Supplements

Selected Readings

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Foreword

The importance of nutrition for human health has long been recognized. Prior to 1960, interest in this field largely focused on the etiology and prevention of acute nutrient deficiency diseases such as scurvy, rickets, and pellagra. Some 50 essential nutrients (vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, cofactors, essential amino acids, essential fatty acids) were identified, and recommended daily intakes for those essential nutrients (e.g. Recommended Dietary Allowances or RDAs) were developed. These recommendations, in turn, proved to be valuable in eradicating acute nutrient deficiency diseases.

During the past 20-30 years, attention has shifted to the role of diet and nutrition in the pathogenesis of chronic degenerative diseases. Heart disease, some cancers, osteoporosis, type II diabetes, and macular degeneration are all known to have dietary risk factors, many of which involve chronic nutrient deficiencies. Importantly, these associations have been much more difficult to study, in large measure because of the time frames involved. Chronic degenerative diseases develop over decades (lifetimes), and it is extremely challenging to conduct research programs for such extended periods. Nevertheless, advances in epidemiological and clinical research have helped us learn a great deal about the impacts (positive and negative) of diet and essential nutrient intakes on long-term health.

During the past decade, the scientific and healthcare communities have paid increasing attention to the role of nutritional supplements (as components of diet) in preventing and treating chronic disease. Hundreds of scientific studies have been conducted and published. These studies span a broad range of health issues. They have employed a wide variety of methodologies. And they have produced both positive and negative results. In some areas (e.g. the role of calcium and vitamin D supplements in slowing the progression of osteoporosis, and the role of folic acid supplements in preventing certain birth defects), results have been consistent, and benefits have been well accepted. In other areas (e.g. the role of antioxidant supplementation in preventing heart disease) results have been less consistent, and conclusions remain controversial. In any event, research on the health benefits of nutritional supplements is progressing, and evidence continues to mount that nutritional supplements offer a convenient and cost effective means for promoting health, over both the short- and long-terms.

The following is a list of bibliographic references for recent scientific papers describing research on the health benefits of nutritional supplements. The list is not exhaustive. Papers were selected on the basis of scientific merit and relevance to the field, regardless of whether positive or negative results were obtained. Our objective in compiling this list was to provide readers with a good cross section of the scientific literature so that they can develop a sense for the current state of research in this field and draw their own conclusions concerning the role of supplementation in health care. For convenience, the references have been sorted by health issue; namely Cardiovascular Health, Cancer Prevention, Strong Bones, Healthy Pregnancies/Healthy Babies, Sound Metabolism, Robust Immune Function, Acute Vision, and Other.

Abstracts for most of the papers cited in this bibliography can be obtained on-line at www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/. In PubMed, select Single Citation Matcher from

the PubMed Services, enter the bibliographic information for the article you wish, and click on search. This will bring up the single citation. Double click on the authors' names (in blue) to view the full abstract.

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Cardiovascular Health

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