

## Is it a Good Vitamin?

While everyone loves a bargain, there are some problems with shopping for supplements using only price as a guideline. The difference in quality between different brands of supplements is often considerable. Also, treating yourself or relying on untrained individuals for health advice is not a good idea.

Herbs, vitamins and minerals are meant to be utilized by the body, to help with physiology and biochemistry. Think of wine or ice cream. The only physiologic concern with these products is taste, but what a difference between the quality of a cheap product and a good one. Compare the taste of a premium ice cream to the cheap store brand; the difference is considerable. Compare inexpensive wine to Lafite Rothschild. It should be obvious that the difference between the quality of vitamins and herbs should be at least as great.

Quality and bioavailability are important. Bioavailability is a difficult concept for some patients to grasp. It has to do with how well the supplement is utilized by the body. There is gasoline in coal, you just can't run your car on it. Similarly, there are ingredients listed on a supplement's label that are as useless to your body as coal is to your automobile.

### **We have looked into the issues that affect supplement quality for you:**

- **Does the company actually make the vitamin?** Many companies do not do their own manufacturing. They merely label and market the products. The problem here is that it is very difficult to do any kind of quality control.
- **Quality of components:** Take calcium, for example. Oyster shell has calcium, but the body can't use it (just like your car can't use the gasoline in coal). Calcium carbonate is cheap, but is not well absorbed. Calcium citrate is much more expensive than the oyster shell or the carbonate. A high quality supplement will use the citrate, a poor one will use oyster shell. There are similar quality issues for just about every vitamin and herb.
- **Label claims:** Are the ingredients listed on label actually contained in the product? You would be shocked at how often they are not. Part of the problem is how a lot of vitamin companies do business. They usually use a document called a *Certificate of Assay*. This document states that the batch of material actually contains the material. Most companies don't actually test batches of material—they rely on this document. The government doesn't even require them to have this certificate; face it, there isn't a lot of legislation governing the practices of supplement companies. The problem is that as the product changes hands, there is danger of contamination, tampering and outright fraud. Many companies don't actually produce their own vitamins, and they don't test what they buy. Without testing, you can be lied to about the content of the product. Second, by the time the product changes hands several times, anywhere along the line someone can substitute cheaper or even phony ingredients and not be held accountable. The

product can be contaminated when it changes hands. Sometimes the label claims are fraudulent. What happens if the government finds out? It's usually not a problem for a company committing fraud—the government doesn't check unless there is a *specific* complaint. Even when the government does check, there is simply a product recall; no one is charged with fraud or any other crime. None of the players are required to keep records of the handling of the material. No one is accountable. Health care offices that deal with nutrition usually take the time to find reputable manufacturers.

- **Are the products tested for quality or for contaminants?** There is not a lot of government regulation in this industry. The best way to protect yourself is to find a company that you trust, that makes its own products and tests the quality and purity of its products.
- **Where did the materials come from?** Most of the botanicals purchased in the US come from the Far East. There are manufacturing practices in some Third World countries that would surprise many Americans. An equipment supplier to the vitamin industry described a situation in one Third World plant where material that had fallen on the floor was gathered and sold. In a sterile environment this would not be a problem, but the environment is seldom sterile in this part of the world.
- **How is the tablet or capsule made?** Something as simple as how a tablet is produced can affect bioavailability. Many manufacturers use inert ingredients that interfere with the absorption of the nutrients. Capsules generally have less inert material than tablets. There is one company that makes tablets, but the tablets are extremely bioavailable. Biotics Research Corporation actually makes tablet with a vegetable based culture. In other words, they put the vitamin in a food base, so the body treats it like a food. It also has more antioxidant activity and enhances absorption of the nutrient. There are, of course, other good companies. This is just an example of some of the innovation that is available when a company puts quality first. In general, supplements in capsules are better absorbed than supplements in tablets (with the exception, of course, of the vegetable-based tableting mentioned in the last paragraph). But even capsules can contain inert ingredients that interfere with absorption. Sometimes it is necessary to use a little cellulose in capsules that contain very little active ingredient or with nutrients or herbal extracts that will not flow properly in the capsuling machine. When high volume is a concern of the manufacturer, inert ingredients are added to enable the machines to work faster. It speeds up production, but makes the vitamin less absorbable.
- **How long will the product keep its potency on the shelf?** This is another "label claims" issue. Vitamins break down over time. Will the label be accurate after six months? A year? Is there a clear expiration date on the vitamins? If the vitamins (minerals, herbs whatever) are produced in exactly the amounts that are listed on the label, in a short period of time the label will be inaccurate

because the nutrients will break down. A good company will put more of each ingredient into a capsule or tablet so that the label claims will be true in one or even two years.

- **Are the formulations good:** Is there research and clinical evidence to support the use of a given supplement? Is it a reasonable formulation for the desired outcome? Is there support information that is reasonable and credible? Has the company designed a product that will get results? Many times companies jump on bandwagons and aggressively market substances that really don't work the way consumers think they will. We can help you know the difference between marketing and science.

There's a lot to know when buying supplements and herbs. Health care is much more complex than you may realize. Quality is so important. We are talking about your health here. We are talking about the quality of your life. Come in for a consultation and discuss the issue of supplement quality and any other health issues with which you are concerned. Treating yourself with bargain basement supplements is not a good idea.

Here is the ad you can use:

### **Stop Flushing Your Money Down the Toilet!**

If you take a daily multi-vitamin, chances are, you're flushing most of the nutrients down the toilet. Free health report reveals the hidden truth about daily multi-vitamins.

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