



SMART NUTRITION

HOW TO DETERMINE THE BEST SUPPLEMENTS

article by Brett Bernstein

In some point of their lives, most people have turned to vitamins to supplement their dietary intake of essential vitamins and minerals. For some, it's a precise ritual that goes hand in hand with other health-conscious habits. For others, it's a half-hearted attempt to offset the damage done by poor diet and fast-food tendencies. Whatever side of the scale you're on, nutritional supplements, for the most part, are a wise and healthful decision. However, it's no longer a matter of taking supplements, but rather which supplements are the best to take. So, if your current dietary regime includes nutritional supplements, what you think is a feast may actually be a famine, in terms of

nutritional value and safety. It's time to read the small print.

Who isn't guilty (human) of enjoying an occasional fast-food burger? A typical fast food meal comes with lower quality ingredients than its steakhouse counterpart, yet they're both considered hamburgers. Ever wonder why? It's because food adheres to food grade standards set forth by the FDA. Imagine if everything was that lax: you could be buying killer aspirin, contracting infections from blood transfusions, applying skin altering make-up and trusting dangerously toxic nutritional supplements. The FDA drew up stricter guidelines in some, but not all areas. Medicine is

required to be safe, effective, and identical to all other batches no matter when or where you acquire it. Blood transfusions and cosmetics comply with specific standards. But supplements, they got lumped together with food, and the integrity of their industry has suffered.

To make matters worse, the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 put responsibility in the hands of the vitamin producers. According to fda.gov, "...Manufacturers do not need to register their products with FDA nor get FDA approval before producing or selling dietary supplements." This opened the floodgates for a slew of unprotected claims and flat out lies.

Protect yourself by following these three simple guidelines when buying nutritional supplements: is it safe, does it get absorbed, and is the company credible?

Safety ultimately refers to contamination and toxicity. According to the not-for-profit Informed-Choice LLC, roughly 25% of supplements could be contaminated. A reputable nutrition company constantly examines their raw materials for harmful impurities like salmonella, pesticides, E.coli and steroids. Look for brands that are approved for athletes, as they must be guaranteed the products are free from banned substances. Additionally, this athlete testing promotes consistency from bottle to bottle and capsule to capsule. Some minerals can be harmful in too great a dose, so the science-based companies that care about your health will test each batch to guarantee proactive levels. If you are unsure, contact the company and request third party results. If they don't have any, don't trust the product.

Assuming you find a safe product, it's still useless if the body doesn't absorb it. The supplement should meet the U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP) specifications; a non-governmental and not-for-profit entity that sets standards for over-the-

counter and prescription drugs, as well as for food and nutritional supplements sold in the United States. Look for a product that boasts, "Meets USP Specifications for..." disintegration, or dissolution, as this will be your best bet for finding a tablet that breaks down and grants your system access to the nutrients.

While you're doubtful to find a safe and effective product without an honest company, it's still important to know what to look for in a supplement brand. First of all, of the several thousand vitamin brands out there, there are only a handful of manufacturers. The vast majority of products are practically identical with the exception of packaging. Look for the ones with in-house production as they are more likely to be scientific-based as opposed to marketing based. Also, determine if the company voluntarily adheres to the Pharmaceutical Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) that is required of prescription medicine. A vitamin company that realizes their products have as great an impact as a prescription drug will take their ethical responsibility seriously.

Being a consumer is a daunting process, especially when you're in the market for a good nutritional supplement. I suggest finding reputable third party research before dishing out lots of money on high end products that are overpriced or low end products that do absolutely nothing, or worse. The Nutrisearch Comparative Guide to Nutritional Supplements is a great place to find information about what your body needs and what companies you can trust to supply it. Led by a biochemist and former member of Canadian Parliament, the team of scientists first compromised on what the ideal vitamin would be, and then compared over 1,500 products to that standard. Its five star rating system and color-coded charts make it easy to digest the facts about that vitamin you've been trusting for years. It's your health; consume responsibly.