



TO YOUR HEALTH



Volume 13, Number 9

September 2008

VITAMIN VIGNETTE

by Barbara Chenoweth, NP

Confusion reigns when it comes to vitamins and dietary supplements: which to take, how much, how many? Hardly a week goes by without an article touting the advantages of a specific vitamin or disparaging a previously held benefit. Added to the mounds of conflicting information, or perhaps because of it, there is evidence that the percentage of women who take dietary supplements, including calcium, has dropped by 13% from 2005 to 2007, (*Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter*, April 2008). What does this mean and how does one make sense out of the ever changing recommendations?

While more authorities are emphasizing the value of eating healthy food rather than relying on vitamins and supplements, most agree that a good multivitamin is important for people over 65. However, selecting a multivitamin is not a simple matter. Anyone who has tried this exercise at a pharmacy quickly realizes that the choices can be overwhelming. A few guidelines may help:

- Look for a multivitamin with vitamin A in the form of "mixed carotenoids" with beta-carotene instead of vitamin A palmitate or acetate, or retinol.
- Avoid those with iron; most people do not need iron, and it can cause nausea.
- Choose one that dissolves easily, not a hard bullet that might not absorb well.
- Most do not contain enough calcium, so a separate calcium supplement is necessary.
- Select one with vitamin D3, cholecalciferol, because it is used best by the body, not vitamin D2.

Vitamin D, the sunshine vitamin, is becoming a star as more is learned about its value and benefits. Most remember the classic vitamin D deficiency, Ricketts, that caused deformity in starving children. Vitamin D not only prevents weak bones, but it prevents muscle weakness as well. A study in the *Australian Archives of Internal Medicine*, (*Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter*, April 2008) found that older adults can reduce their risk of winter falls by 20% by ensuring they get enough vitamin D, 1000 IU per day.

In addition, The Canadian Cancer Society now recommends an increased amount of vitamin D, 1000 IU per day, because it was persuaded that vitamin D may reduce the risk of colorectal, breast and prostate cancers. Likewise, the *Harvard Health Letter*, (June 2007) summarized the recommendations of various expert sources and came to a similar conclusion: more vitamin D is necessary than was previously thought. It also suggested that the upper limits of daily vitamin D (2000 IU) may need to be increased, perhaps up to 10,000 IU per day.

At the moment, the National Osteoporosis Foundation is one of the first to officially recommend 800 to 1000 IU of vitamin D per day. In the future, it is likely that this recommendation, as well as higher dosages, will become widely accepted. Most multivitamins include 400 IU of vitamin D. The balance can be obtained in a calcium supplement that contains vitamin D, usually 100 to 200 IU per tablet, and/or an additional tablet of vitamin D 400 IU. Check your vitamin and calcium bottles.

Another evolving change is the amount of calcium that is recommended. Instead of



the old recommendation of 1200 to 1500 mg. per day, the newer recommendation is for between 700 to 1000 mg. per day, in divided doses. The emphasis is shifting to more vitamin D and less calcium for healthy bones. However, calcium is still important to prevent bone loss; it also may help protect against colon cancer, lower blood pressure, prevent insulin resistance, and act as a neuro-muscular relaxant, (*Dr. Andrew Weil's Self Healing*, September 2007). Calcium citrate absorbs best in the body and can be taken without food. Avoid calcium made with oyster shells or bone meal as they may contain lead and other toxic metals. The widely advertised coral calcium is not recommended. And finally, most men do not need calcium unless it has been recommended by their health provider.

As research has demonstrated, large doses of vitamin E and vitamin C have not been found to be beneficial. In the case of vitamin E, high doses may have harmful effects. The amounts contained in a daily multivitamin are usually adequate. Special combinations of vitamins and minerals often are recommended for macular degeneration. With this combination or any other combination of vitamins and minerals, it is essential to add together the total amounts of each vitamin from the various preparations. Often excessive or unnecessary amounts are being taken. Try to simplify what is taken.

As always, the best vitamins and dietary supplements are found in their natural states in food and sunshine. While helpful, pills and capsules cannot substitute for fresh, colorful fruits and vegetables!

HEALTH EDUCATION PROGRAM

Join us on Wednesday, September 17, for "*Thinking Fully about Dying Well: Have I Done Enough?*" presented by Mary Crowe, from Hospice of the North Shore, and Barbara Chenoweth, NP at 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. in Auditorium Center.

THE CORE

by Muire Lindahl

From the core of the apple to the core of the earth, the word "core" refers to the central part of anything. The core of the body is a system of 29 muscles that run the length of the torso. These muscles of the abdomen, back and hip contract to stabilize the spine, pelvis and shoulder girdle to create a solid base of support for all activity. A good way to engage the muscles of the core is to lift the sternum up.

Strong core muscles establish a foundation for all activities. It is essential when strengthening them that exercises are selected to create balance between the anterior and posterior muscles of the body. These include the muscles of the abdomen and spine. It is also important to include the muscles of the lower back, hips and pelvis.

Given that exercise selection is so critical, referring to the experts is the best way to develop an exercise plan to train the core. Personal trainers are highly skilled at program design for core training as are instructors certified to teach specialty classes like yoga and Pilates.

Pilates is of particular interest as it was designed specifically for core training. Joseph Pilates, who developed his exercise system in the early 1900's, refers to the core muscles as the "powerhouse" of the body. In her book, *The Pilates Body*, (New York: Broadway Books, 1968) Brooke Siler summarizes his theory that all energy initiates from the large muscle group in the center of the body.

This fall the CWV fitness staff will be offering classes in both yoga and mat Pilates. The days and times will be listed in the monthly calendar, and as always the staff is available to discuss appropriate exercises for core training.