Mind the (nutritional) gap!

A healthy diet is essential for good health and most nutritionists will tell you that you should get everything you need from a mixed diet. But the truth is that most of us fall short – at least some of the time. And, in countries like Australia and New Zealand, although vitamin deficiencies are rare, insufficient intake of some nutrients does occur and it’s even been linked with a number of chronic conditions including cardiovascular diseases, cancers and osteoporosis.

You already know that plenty of different coloured fruits, veggie serves plus whole grains, lean protein, plenty of nuts and seeds and oily fish are a healthy way to obtain the vitamins, minerals and antioxidants needed for good health every day. You know, too, that calcium-rich foods and drinks are important for bone health. But do you make your quota every day?

Lifestyle factors that could leave you short...

Vitamins and minerals are complex substances that occur naturally in food; they’re vital for regulating the body’s metabolic functions. Taking vitamin supplements can’t replace an unhealthy lifestyle – your body needs the wide range of nutrients that a healthy diet brings. Factors that could increase affect your need for better nutrition include:

1. Too few veggies and fruits. The recommended five serves of vegetables and two fruit serves daily bring a wide range of protective nutrients and pigments as well as fibre and water. Even if you do manage your quota every day, nutrient content can be reduced because of poor storage. Plus, preparation and cooking destroys delicate water-soluble nutrients like vitamin C and folate.

2. Alcohol. 21st century stress can take its toll in many ways and if you use alcohol as a stress buster, poor nutrition can result. You may choose less nutritious foods plus your body uses more nutrients (like B vitamins and vitamin C) to process alcohol which can leave you short.

3. Smoking. Every cigarette destroys vitamin C and you only have very small reserve of this important antioxidant vitamin to start with. Some authorities suggest smokers require double the amount of vitamin C as non-smokers plus the antioxidant minerals selenium and zinc. Quitline on 13 78 48 (Au) or 0800 778 778 (NZ) can help you stub out the smoking habit.

4. Too many takeaways. According to the Dietitians Association of Australia, the average Australian family spends 42 per cent of their food budget on eating out of the home. Increasingly busy living may make you more prone to reaching for ready meals, foods that can be eaten on the go, thrown in the microwave or grabbed from a takeaway. But highly processed foods, can be low on vitamins, minerals and fibre and high in fats, salt and calories. Too many takeaways too often can contribute to poor health.
What supplements supply
Nutritional supplements can help to prevent deficiencies by providing vital vitamins and minerals needed to boost good health. They may not affect how you feel day-to-day, but they top up any low levels to the amount you need which is important for long-term good health.

USANA founder, Dr Myron Wentz, developed a ground-breaking range of nutrients believing that if a wide mix of nutrients – vitamins, minerals and plant pigments – could boost health at the cell level, that it could also boost the health of the whole body. The result was the award winning Essentials™ range.

Nutrition from foods – are you getting enough?
For some nutrients and during some life stages, it’s difficult to obtain enough without using good quality supplements. Shortfalls can occur in the case of:

1. **Increased needs.** For example, young people, pregnant and breastfeeding women, those who are housebound or elderly, and people with chronic conditions or who are on restrictive diets – including long-term weight-losers, meal-skippers, people who eat takeaways regularly and those with digestive disorders – may be short on nutrition.

2. **Athletes.** Exercise-conscious athletes may have increased needs for nutrients – that’s because vigorous training increases the production of free radicals which in turn may raise the body’s need for antioxidant vitamins (beta-carotene, bioflavonoids, vitamin C and vitamin E). Sports people also need to maintain strong, healthy bones and joints and need to consume enough calcium and iron.

3. **Age.** Simply getting older can affect your vitamin and mineral intake. You tend to need less food with age although the need for high quality nutrition remains as important as ever. The ability to absorb nutrients becomes less efficient with age, too.

4. **Nutrient absorption.** Whatever your age, the way that your body absorbs and utilises vitamins and minerals affects your nutritional status. So if you have digestive problems or intolerances, a sub-clinical deficiency can result.

5. **Vitamin D and new research.** Naturally made by the reaction of UV light with a cholesterol-like substance in the skin, most of our vitamin D (90 per cent) is produced by the body; just 10 per cent is provided by foods. Yet many studies show that many of us in Australia and New Zealand are low on the so called sunshine vitamin. Vitamin D has a wide range of functions including bolstering immune function and the maintenance of healthy, strong bones and teeth, lowering the risk of some cancers, as well as other chronic diseases. People with limited exposure to sunlight, dark-skinned people and people who cover their skin for cultural reasons and also fair skinned people (who may avoid the sun due to fear of sunburn) may need a vitamin D boost. People who are very overweight or obese may also need a supplement as although the vitamin is produced, it gets stuck in layers of fat and can’t be used by the body.

6. **Folic acid.** As well as increasing folate (the natural form of this vitamin) via veggies and fruits, women who are pregnant (or considering pregnancy) should take a supplement of folic acid pre-conception and for the first 12 weeks of pregnancy when the brain and spinal cord are developing in the unborn baby. This helps to reduce the risk of neural tube defects (where the spinal cord fails to close properly) causing disability in the unborn child.

**Calcium**
According to the Australian Nutrition Survey, about 90 per cent of women do not achieve the recommended dietary intake (RDI) for calcium. Calcium is vital mineral that’s essential for strong, healthy bones. Women absorb less calcium/excrete more of it around the menopause and this puts them at particular risk of brittle bones that are prone to fracture. Plus a high calcium intake when it’s combined with a high fat makes calcium unavailable for use by the body. A high calcium intake slows the rate of bone loss and may reduce the risk of fracture. Low-fat dairy, almonds and seeds are good sources.
7. **Iodine.** Australia is one of 50 countries worldwide listed by the World Health Organisation as being at risk of iodine deficiency. We only need about a teaspoon of iodine during our entire life, but lack of it in childhood can have serious and lifelong developmental consequences, lowering IQ by as much as 10-15 points.

8. **Calcium.** An essential mineral for the health of the bones and the nervous system, many adults have calcium intakes below the Lower Reference Nutrient Intake (LRNI), a level at which deficiency is likely. The recommended intake (800-1300mg depending on age) is essential for the normal health of bones, the immune system and more. Taking calcium in supplement form can help to safeguard adequate intakes at times when needs are high, e.g. during growth and to prevent osteoporosis; the risk of which is especially high for post-menopausal women. Take it in conjunction with magnesium and vitamin D to enhance absorption.

9. **B vitamins.** The B complex comprises eight different B vitamins which work together to allow your body to use energy from the food you eat at the cell level; B vitamins are also needed for healthy blood. Studies also suggest a link between B vitamins and heart health; they stabilise an amino acid called homocysteine, high levels of which are linked with cardiovascular disease. If you are on a strict vegan diet and/or are frail and not eating a wide variety of foods, you may also be absorbing less from foods and may particularly benefit from a vitamin B12 supplement.

10. **The ACE vitamins and selenium.** Antioxidant vitamins A, C and E combined with the antioxidant mineral selenium are free-radical busters that help to reduce the risk of premature ageing and chronic conditions such as heart disease. For older people, a good selenium intake helps enhance brain function, helping to keep your brain sharp. Vitamin A can be toxic in high doses and is especially not recommended for women who are pregnant. USANA's HealthPak contains vitamin A precursor as beta carotene which is formed into vitamin A by the body but doesn’t have the potential toxic effects of vitamin A.

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**Nutritionists' views of multivitamins**

One study published in the *Nutrition Journal* found 74 per cent of dietitians reported using nutritional supplements regularly, while a fifth (22 per cent) reported using them occasionally or seasonally. Results also showed that a massive 97 per cent of the dietitians interviewed recommended supplements to their clients. Most popular were a multivitamin (84 per cent) whilst just less than one in two (47 per cent) also took omega-3 supplements. A further 63 per cent took calcium and 43 per cent took vitamin D.

Asked why they took nutritional supplements, just over half (58 per cent) of dietitians said they took them for bone health, 53 per cent took them for overall wellness and 42 per cent said they took them to fill nutrient gaps in their diet.
More than a multivitamin **HealthPak** was formulated to help maintain normal, healthy bones and joints, healthy eyes, and to provide support for general wellbeing. **HealthPak** is a convenient way to boost your nutrition. It’s a comprehensive formula that provides a unique combination of vitamins and minerals for a full-spectrum, highly potent antioxidant armoury. The antioxidant booster provides the ultimate in antioxidant protection. Take it to boost healthy eyes, for strong bones and teeth.

- Great for travelling and/or no need to fuss with numerous bottles or trying to remember which tablets to take and when, **HealthPak** makes maintaining your health and lifestyle much more convenient as one box contains 56 individually-wrapped packets for an AM and PM four-week supply.

- Wide-Spectrum multivitamin and multimineral; provides over 40 highly bioavailable ingredients in a convenient, easy-to-use package, and helps to maintain normal, healthy immune function and mental alertness. A source of magnesium: helps to reduce the occurrences of leg cramps*.

Take the contents of one packet in the morning and one packet in the evening, preferably with meals. Each packet contains:

- **Essentials™** (2 Mega Antioxidant and 2 MultiMineral) (the **Essentials** range that has been awarded a maximum 5-Star rated supplements in Australia and New Zealand)

- **Active Calcium Plus™** (one)

- **AO Booster™** (one)

Meets British Pharmacopoeia specifications for potency, uniformity, and disintegration where applicable. Do not take while on warfarin therapy without medical advice.

Contains sorbic acid and sodium benzoate.

This product contains selenium which is toxic in high doses. A daily dose of 150µg (microgram) for adults of selenium from dietary supplements should not be exceeded.

Do not exceed the stated dose unless on medical advice. Seek expert medical advice if your child has spina bifida or another neural tube defect.

Vitamin supplements should not replace a balanced diet.

USE ONLY AS DIRECTED. ALWAYS READ THE LABEL.

*IF SYMPTOMS PERSIST SEE YOUR DOCTOR OR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL.*