



# SUPER-5 NUTRIENTS

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As an acupuncturist and integrative healer I am very concerned with my patients' nutritional health. Each person may need some special guidance or tweaking of the recommendations below, but as they stand they provide a good basic set of nutrients to help support good health. Here's my take on the "Super-5" that can benefit most people if taken daily.

1. **Multi-vitamin-mineral Mix.** Everyone should consume a multi-mix as a kind of dietary fail-safe. They come as capsules, pills or in liquid form. But which one will suit you best? This is trickier than it sounds!

- First, people under 40 can usually benefit from added iron in the mix, but people over 40 should ordinarily *avoid* iron supplements.
- Second, men and women over 40 benefit from slightly different nutrient mixes—men need prostate protection and women help with menopausal issues. Growing kids needs differ from those of adults.
- How the nutrients are combined into pill form also matters. Common inexpensive multi-mixes are combined with chemical salts, which makes them about 10% bioavailable (a measure of how much your body can actually absorb once you swallow the capsule). Better choices are combined with amino acids (40-50% bioavailable) or fructooligosaccharides (about 90% bioavailable). To get the biggest bang for your buck, which would you choose? That's obvious but—how do you know how your multi-mix has been made? A high quality manufacturer will tell you...ask the specialists at your supplier, read the label, consult the Web. Your high-quality supplement may cost more, but it will also serve you better.

Bottom line: find a high quality multi-mix that is designed for your age and sex, and consider it the foundation of your supplementation program.

2. **Essential Fatty Acids.** These take care of your nervous system, blood vessels, and skin, and reduce excessive inflammatory response...not to mention that most Americans are deficient in Omega 3 fatty acids. The simplest solution?: buy Omega 3 EFAs in capsule or liquid form and consume 1 - 2 grams daily. The best source of Omega 3 EFAs are krill oil, fish oil (today without the fishy taste) or flaxseed oil. (To minimize the "fishy burp" effect, choose a capsule protected with an enteric coat.) If you have skin problems, add Omega 6 in the form of Evening Primrose or Borage oil. And if your skin is dry, use a skin lotion or cream with EFAs built in.

3. **Bioflavonoids/Antioxidants.** Plant foods are full of substances that protect the plants—and us too—from the effects of decay products (free radicals)

produced by environmental exposure, digestion and metabolism, and even from exposure to the sun. Bioflavonoids/antioxidants help 'clean up' the body and prevent rapid aging, including cancer. By eating a diet high in fruits and vegetables, you'll get a lot of bioflavonoids. You can also purchase them in pill or liquid form. Since there are a great many to choose from, it can get overwhelming. Vitamins C, A, and E are all antioxidants, but compared to pycnogenol, quercetin, green tea, and others, these vitamins are rather 'weak'—they don't do as much to destroy free radicals as do the plant substances listed. Thus even if your multi-mix contains the traditional vitamins, you might want to add a bioflavonoid or antioxidant mix (the two words mean different things but overlap when it gets to actual substances).

**4. B-vitamins, Magnesium, and other Minerals.** If you don't eat whole grains, or are vegetarian, or your life is stressful, or you feel depressed or anxious, or your muscles cramp a lot, you can help yourself by adding extra B vitamins and magnesium. These substances are calming to your mind but they are also anti-inflammatory for your whole body, so they also help protect the heart and blood vessels, among other things. Minerals, in general, are calming, plus they support good bone/tooth health. Many people take extra calcium in an effort to protect their bones. However, to get the greatest effect it is important to remember that bones are made up of many minerals, plus Vitamin C, protein, and other substances. So choose a *multi*-mineral mix to protect bone health and support nervous system/mood health, and look for calcium gluconate or calcium lactate on the label to be sure it's bioavailable. For best absorption, magnesium should be consumed at  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{2}{3}$  the dose of calcium, so check that your supplement offers this ratio. If you consume too much magnesium, you'll develop diarrhea, so pay attention!

**5. Co-Q10, Alpha-Lipoic Acid, L-Carnitine, Ginko herb.** These antioxidants are particularly helpful to people who are concerned with good blood vessel health in heart and brain. The first three are produced naturally by your body, but the amount diminishes as we age, so it's wise to supplement. If you are taking a statin drug (anti-cholesterol), it's *essential* to supplement with Co-Q10. Ginko is an extract from a tree leaf that has been known for centuries to enhance brain circulation. With good brain circulation you can keep your memory working well, and reduce the danger of headache and stroke.

For (lots) more information, consult a book such as Balch and Balch *Prescription for Nutritional Healing*, and to get the best mix for YOU, talk to your acupuncturist or other nutrition specialist.