

Supplement Use Among US Adults: Implications for the Doctor Of Chiropractic (September 2004)

Dr. Amy Millen and her colleagues at the National Cancer Institute (1) confirm what most of us already know: dietary supplement use among US adults is extensive and continues to grow. Data from the National Health Interview Surveys of 1987 through 2000, indicates that daily multi-vitamin use has almost doubled in that time period.

Adults reporting using other supplements, like herbs and specialty products such as melatonin and evening primrose oil, has increased at least threefold since the early 1990's. Some 127 million American adults take dietary supplements every day or at least occasionally, thinking that adequate intake of nutrients can possibly prevent and treat some health problems or reach some "optimal state of health".

Supplement sales reached \$18.8 billion in 2002 (2), more than double the \$8.6 billion in 1994. Research on how these products might affect human physiology and function has never kept pace with consumer interest and use. Some supplements are worth considering while others are not. Some carry risks for certain people, especially if used inappropriately. Too often the products are of poor quality and claim potential health benefits that represent sales hype rather than evidence needed to guide a selection and use. There are concerns about whether the right products are being taken at the proper potencies and forms. The consumer/patient is seeking expert and reliable information to maximize any potential benefits and minimize risks. This presents opportunities for doctors of chiropractic who can be a scientific, rational and reasonable information resource to the patient/consumer, enhancing public safety and recommending the safe, prudent and judicious use of vitamins, minerals, natural medicines, botanicals, homeopathics and glandular extracts.

Patients should be asked about their vitamin, mineral and supplement use to assess whether their intake is adequate and not excessive. In addition, the doctor of chiropractic should document the patient's use of herbal and specialty supplements and discuss with them the reasons for their use. Some for example, may alter the absorption, metabolism, or excretion of medications taken at the same time. Herbs like ginkgo and St. John's Wort should ordinarily not be taken before elective surgery because they can affect blood clotting, heart rate and blood pressure. The use of large doses of antioxidants (like vitamin E and alpha lipoic acid) while receiving radiation or chemotherapy for cancer may compromise the effectiveness of these treatments.

Doctors of chiropractic can help patients/consumers critically assess their supplement practices and advise them towards products where efficacy has been demonstrated in clinical trials and are of verified high quality. They can also ensure that serious adverse events or illnesses that might be caused by supplements are reported to the Food and Drug Administration's MedWatch program at www.cfsan.fda.gov .

Additional resources include the National Institute of Health (<http://dietary-supplements.info.nih.gov>) and the National Center for Alternative and Complementary Medicine (<http://nccam.nih.gov/>)

1. Millen AE, Et al . Use of vitamin, mineral, nonvitamin, and nonmineral supplements in the US: The 1987, 1992 and 2000 National health Surveys. J Am Diet Assoc. 2004; 104: 942-950
2. Supplement Business report 2003. San Diego, CA: Nutrition Business Journal; 2003.