

your multivitamin primer

By | Julie Meyer | 7/19/2002



When you're trying to lose weight, it's hard to meet 100 percent of the RDA (Recommended Dietary Allowance) each and every day. For that reason, people on the Weight Watchers® plan are encouraged to take a multivitamin daily to make sure they're getting the vitamins and minerals they need.

There are a lot of vitamin products out there, however. Here are some pointers for choosing one that's right for you.

Why Multivitamins?

Multivitamins are the best way to cover your nutrition bases in a balanced fashion. Single supplements, such as folate or zinc, can produce an imbalance and lead to a deficiency in other nutrients. "It's easy to go overboard on a single nutrient, which can be damaging to your health," says Chris Rosenbloom, PhD, RD, spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association. But some people do need specific nutrient supplements — it's a good idea to check with your physician.

What You Need

When choosing a multivitamin, check the nutrition label, which should include a list of all the product's vitamins and minerals, as well as the dosage. Says Rosenbloom, "Make sure your supplement has 100 percent of *most* vitamins and minerals, not much more and not less." It should include at least vitamins A, C, E, D, K, folic acid, calcium, iron and zinc. Also, special formulas, such as those designed for women or seniors, can be helpful for meeting special needs, but check the label to make sure you aren't paying more money for fewer nutrients than you'd get in a regular formula.

Is Pricier Better?

Multivitamins and supplements are big business — according to the *Nutrition Business Journal*, an estimated 100 million Americans spend \$6.5 billion each year on them. With so much money being made off supplements, it's critical to make sure your multivitamin comes from a legitimate source. Scams abound, including door-to-door-style sales. "You don't need to buy *designer* vitamins," says Rosenbloom. "Consumer groups find that generic vitamins are just as good as the expensive kind." Also, since supplements are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), you're best off buying them from a recognized store. So if your next-door neighbor tries to sell you a month's supply of "premium" vitamins for \$100, politely decline and head to your local drugstore.

Timing Is Everything

To get in the multivitamin habit, take one around the same time daily. If you're often on the go, "organize your vitamins in a pillbox that fits into your purse or briefcase so you have no excuse not to take them," says Esther Blum, MS, RD, a holistic nutritionist in New York. Blum also advises her patients to take vitamins with a meal to prevent getting a "sour" stomach.

No Quick Fix

Vitamins are useful, but it's important to keep in mind that they're not a cure-all. "No amount of vitamins will compensate for a lousy diet," says Blum. So if you're using up all your daily **POINTS®** allowance on marshmallows and Pirate's Booty, a vitamin at the end of the day is not going to get you out of the nutrition doghouse!

The best approach to meeting your daily requirements of vitamins and minerals is to eat healthy, well-balanced meals *and* take a multivitamin each day. And remember: It is the supplement that supplements your diet, not the other way around.