

Optimal Nutrition

Supplements or Foods?

There are two prominent, often competing, ideas about how to optimize our nutritional well-being:

- The best way to get a natural balance of essential nutrients is to get all nutrients from a variety of foods.
- The highly processed food diets of the developed world are lacking in so many essential nutrients that most people will need to supplement their diet in order to achieve optimal nutrition.

Which is correct? Which is wrong?

Both!!

It is true that careful selection of whole foods is the safest way to achieve optimal nutrition of the 40+ essential nutrients. Foods come from the natural world of plants and animals, so getting our nutrients from these sources ensure, overall, that our nutrients will be balanced—an important consideration.

However, it is also true that in today's world of processed food, once whole foods such as wheat, corn, milk, seeds, etc are separated into components that are then reblended into tasty foods that often lack essential nutrients. For example, whole wheat is refined into flour, and in that process the wheat germ and bran, reservoirs of most of the wheat grain's nutrients, are removed. They are often sold separately, or used for other purposes. The refined starchy part of the wheat grain, called the endosperm, is ground into flour that is routinely enriched with iron, niacin, thiamin, riboflavin and folic acid—(and sometimes enriched with calcium). Thus only 5 (or 6) of the 40+ essential nutrients found in whole wheat are added back during this process. This flour is used in many processed foods.

It is interesting to note that food provides most people with generally adequate amounts of these nutrients used in flour enrichment programs while those foods DO NOT provide most people with adequate amounts of other nutrients such as potassium, magnesium, vitamin E, vitamin A and vitamin C. [What We Eat In America: www.ars.usda.gov/SP2UserFiles/Place/12355000/pdf/usualintakeables2001-02.pdf.] **Boris: mark this link with the title: "What We Eat In America" . You don't need the whole reference. Andrea**
That leaves most of us dependent upon nutritional supplements, unless we want to change our diets to a healthy diet.

Healthy Diet means a steady variety of

- at least 3 daily servings of whole grains,
- 9 daily servings of fruits and/or vegetables,
- nuts, seeds and legumes each day,
- meat or fish and dairy each day (unless vegetarian)

while largely turning away from foods containing substantial amounts of

- sugar,
- high-fructose corn syrup,
- refined flour and
- refined oils –

the highly processed foods that are so appealing and available.

Juicing may help in balancing food-nutrients in a concentrated form, but not all people have the time, interest, space, equipment or patience to juice fruits and vegetables daily. For those who do, it may be an excellent way to maximize absorbed nutrients from fruits and vegetables, but may minimize the benefits of fiber. In addition, comprehensive mineral analysis of juicing procedures is not generally available from the evidence-based scientific journals.

If vitamin-mineral supplements are decided upon, the natural balance of essential nutrients found in a highly varied diet of whole foods is not guaranteed—one must use one's wits and knowledge of one's body to discern how much of a nutrient is required. Since many nutrients' toxic effect mimics the effect of a deficit, this can be a tricky job. Information that can help us balance our nutrients while supplementing is available from the [summary of "What We Eat In America"](#) on this website.