



More Than Vitamins

By Wendy Marks
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Most of us are conscious of vitamins but pay less attention to minerals. Trace minerals are little substances that pack a big punch! Their absence even for a short while can cause problems in all areas of body function. Here's a primer of the major players.

Magnesium helps keep your heart pumping, works in fending off colds and flu, and keeps those leg muscles kicking. Low magnesium levels affect hypertension, heart disease, osteoporosis, and diabetes. They may also cause constipation, cramps, insomnia, headaches, and fatigue. Consuming plenty of dark leafy greens like spinach and swiss chard, as well as nuts and seeds, mackerel, and lima beans is the way to get your magnesium.

Phosphorus helps build bones and teeth, and also keeps our electrolytes balanced. This is particularly important after exercise. Deficiency can affect appetite, weight, and bone density and strength. Protein rich foods, such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy products, nuts, and legumes, are good sources of phosphorus.

Zinc supports normal growth and development, and helps regulate appetite, stress level, taste and smell. It also has antioxidant properties and helps the immune system. Low zinc can affect all of the above; other symptoms may include weight loss, delayed wound healing, taste changes, and mental fuzziness. Look to beef and lamb, liver, spinach, pumpkin and squash seeds, pork, chicken to keep zinc levels up.

Calcium is found in your bones as well as in your blood. Crucial for maintaining proper nerve and heart function, blood clotting, and muscle contraction, a low blood calcium level can affect the functions of the nervous system. Mood changes such as depression may also result. Dairy products (milk, yogurt, and cheese), sardines, and vegetables (Chinese cabbage, kale, and broccoli) are good sources of calcium. Please note that for those of us who don't eat dairy, almond milk, soy milk, and coconut milk may also be a good source. It is best to get it in your food rather than as a supplement in most cases.

Iron is only required in small amounts, but it is essential. If you do not have enough iron, your body cannot make hemoglobin, the oxygen-carrying component of red blood cells, and you may develop anemia. Symptoms of anemia include feeling tired, difficulty breathing, dizziness, headaches, and feeling cold. Meat, seafood, poultry, beans, peas, and dark green leafy vegetables are all good sources of iron.

Potassium helps maintain the correct balance of fluid in the body and its pH balance. Potassium triggers muscle contractions, including heart muscle contractions. The balance of potassium with other electrolytes is very important to feeling your active best. Weakness, fatigue, muscle cramps, or constipation may indicate low potassium. Potassium can be found in citrus fruits, apples, bananas, apricots, cantaloupe, potatoes

(especially with the skin), tomatoes, spinach, Brussels sprouts, mushrooms, beans, peas, and almonds.

Selenium is an essential trace mineral that has potent antioxidant properties, and it is a key player in thyroid function. Low selenium may cause tiredness, loss of appetite, weight gain, hair loss, intolerance to cold, dry skin, and constipation. It may also affect your mood making you feel depressed. Eat Brazil nuts, sunflower seeds, fish (halibut, sardines, flounder, salmon), shellfish (oysters, mussels, shrimp, clams, and scallops), meat (beef, liver, lamb and pork), poultry (chicken and turkey), eggs, and mushrooms (button, crimini, shiitake).

It's a good idea to get a blood test if you think you may be deficient in any of these minerals. The best way to get your minerals is from eating whole, fresh foods, because of their greater nutritional value. Spring is now here and local produce is back. Enjoy your fresh fruits and vegetables and know they are supporting your healthy body. If you choose to take a formulated supplement to address the levels of these minerals please be careful to ensure you take an appropriate dosage.

Happy Spring!

Wendy