



Body needs all the essential nutrients

The most important concept in good nutrition is meeting the body's need for all of the essential nutrients. Some nutrients, like protein, are needed in fairly large amounts. However, vitamins and minerals are needed in rather small amounts and therefore are often called micronutrients.

Question: Since micronutrients are needed in such small amounts, does that mean that they are less important than other nutrients?

Answer: No. Since each essential nutrient is needed for specific body functions, all nutrients are important and absolutely necessary in the diet. If any essential nutrient is deficient in a person's diet, the result is serious and can even lead to death.

Q: What is the difference between vitamins and minerals?

A: Vitamins are complex chemical compounds. Minerals are individual elements rather

than complex chemical compounds. Consequently, vitamin function is lost if its chemical structure is changed. This can happen by exposure to heat, various chemicals, air or even light, depending on the vitamin. Some vitamins are more susceptible to breakdown than others. For example, vitamin C is sensitive to heat, and most of it can be lost in cooking.

Minerals, on the other hand, do not break down like vitamins, but they can be lost from foods through processing and preparation.

Q: Is it best to get vitamins and minerals from foods or supplements?

A: The ideal is to obtain nutrients from foods. However, there are various reasons why this ideal might not always be practical or even possible.

Diets that are limited in quantity, variety or quality can benefit greatly from the proper use of dietary supplements.

People who are dieting or have a sedentary lifestyle might not eat enough total food to obtain all the vitamins and minerals they need.

Q: What affects the amount of vitamins and minerals in foods?

A: Agricultural practices, processing and storage can all affect the amount of micronutrients in foods. The vitamins in produce, for example, can vary due to the specific variety of fruit or vegetable or the ripeness, freshness and preparation techniques.

The amounts of trace minerals like zinc, selenium and iodine are affected by the amounts of these minerals present in the soil.

Consequently, to best meet your nutrient needs, eat a variety of fresh, wholesome foods grown in a variety of places. If your diet is limited in quantity or quality, then dietary supplements could help.

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