

Nutritional Medicine

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The use of nutrition as a tool to prevent and treat diseases is as old as human history itself. Nutritional medicine uses well-researched nutrients in a therapeutic setting to prevent diseases before they happen, and to cure diseases at their root, after the onset of symptoms. Interest in and use of dietary supplements have grown considerably in the past two decades.

Optimum nutrition means different things to different people. The basics of eating fruits, vegetables, proteins, whole grains and essential fats are more important now than ever. Many foods available in the marketplace today are lacking in essential nutrients because they've been processed, or chemicals such as preservatives and dye have been added to them. Processed food is not the same as naturally occurring "raw" foods - which are high in fiber, antioxidants, and nutrients. We may not be receiving all the nutrients we need from the food we eat. Recent surveys show that most of us do not even meet the Reference Daily Intake (RDIs) of several essential nutrients. Furthermore, nutritional medicine often recommends higher than minimum levels of these nutrients.

How do you know if you are getting the nutrients your body needs to flourish? Optimal health is reflected in some of the following signs: good energy, ideal weight, clear skin, good muscle tone, good appetite and digestion, and alert mental function. If you can't say that all of these signs apply to your state of being, nutritional medicine can probably help.

Nutritional medicine supports the idea that nature makes better pharmaceuticals than a lab can ever make. The first natural pharmaceuticals we concern ourselves with are the foods and liquids that we ingest. Averaged out over our life, food, air and water are the most powerful medicines we will take, and an adequate intake of healthy food is the beginning of nutritional health. For many people, especially those under the age of forty, this is all that is required for a healthy body. Most disease, in the view of the nutritional doctor, is an outcome of many years of unbalanced nutrition. Sub-optimal levels of vitamins and minerals in the body, ingestion of chemical-laced, processed food, or the taking of drugs over a long period of time inhibits our body's production of energy required for optimal health.

Vitamins and minerals, by definition, cannot be manufactured in the body. Therefore, vitamin and mineral deficiencies become a real possibility. There are other substances, not strictly vitamins or minerals, which can be manufactured in the body but as we age we are able to make less than is necessary for perfect functioning. These kinds of substances have important roles in nutritional medicine. Premature aging, a common condition, has a lot to do with poor absorption of nutrients.

A dietary supplement is a product (other than tobacco) taken by mouth that contains a "dietary ingredient" intended to supplement the diet. Dietary supplements are considered foods, not drugs. Dietary ingredients may include vitamins, minerals, herbs or other botanicals, amino

acids, and substances such as enzymes, organ tissues, and metabolites. Supplements come in many forms, including extracts, concentrates, tablets, capsules, gel caps, liquids, and powders. Non-herbal supplements are now a popular choice for patients seeking relief from a variety of medical conditions. Use of vitamin and mineral supplements, a subset of dietary supplements, by the U.S. population has been a growing trend since the 1970s. National surveys indicate that 40 to 46 percent of Americans reported taking at least one vitamin or mineral supplement at some time within the month surveyed.

In contrast to dietary supplements, foods are components of the usual diet that have biologically active components that may provide health benefits beyond basic nutrition. Examples of functional foods include soy, nuts, chocolate, and cranberries. These foods' bioactive constituents are appearing with increasing frequency as ingredients in dietary supplements. Unlike dietary supplements, functional foods may claim specific health benefits.

Whatever your nutritional state, your health is sure to benefit from a consultation with a nutritional specialist. The goal of optimal health requires optimal nutrition.

Patient's Guide: How do I use Nutritional Medicine?

An appointment with a nutritional consultant can be made through several referral sources. Since this is basically a consumer education process, you do not need many visits, just enough to get you started on your new regimen and to follow your progress. Your practitioner may wish you to have nutritional testing to determine deficits and follow the progress of your return to health.