

PROMISES, PROMISES

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About 14 years ago I read a really interesting book entitled Enter the Zone by Dr. Barry Sears. At that time I was introduced to the concept that food is responsible for most of the diseases that we have and also is responsible for most of our wellness. The differences in these two extremes – from wellness to disease – are related to the types of food eaten, its quantity, and the extent to which it affects our body’s inflammatory processes. For example, eating foods that increase the “bad” prostaglandin levels will cause arthritis, heart disease, and even diabetes.

After learning a lot about food and how it is capable of influencing our health, I then began to read and think about supplements of all sorts. We all know that vitamins were discovered many years ago and that smaller discoveries have been made since then. As you no doubt know by reading current magazines, now there are many different kinds of supplements, each holding the “promise” of taking care of arthritis, mental deterioration, bad skin, muscle weakness, etc., etc., etc.

With all the promises being made about all the substances that we could take, use, or apply in and on our bodies, how can we really analyze what would be good for us and what would really be worthless?

It is clear from quite a few studies that a multivitamin does enhance our well-being. In the Women’s Health Initiative Study, it was noted that keeping a normal body weight, exercising, not smoking, and taking a multivitamin were the four factors that encouraged longer life and freedom from disease in this large group of nurses. We also know that as vitamins were discovered throughout the years, the general population actually jumped at the chance to add nutrients to their bodies to help them become healthier.

At time same time, it became obvious that many of the fruits and vegetables grown using the new types of nitrogen-based fertilizer had increased volume and good color, but actually had far fewer nutrients than “natural” grown fruits and vegetables from years ago. We also know from many studies that using vitamins made from natural sources provided much more efficient nutrients to your body than vitamins made from synthetic sources.

We have discovered over the years that claims made for vitamins such as vitamin E, beta-carotene, and many others failed to live up to expectations or promises about what they would do. We have come to appreciate the importance of diet in aiding our body’s natural ability to produce vitamins on its own, such as vitamins C and D.

There is a very good group known as the Life Extension Foundation whose dedicated purpose for many years has been to improve health in their members, mostly by adding different types of nutrients to their daily intake. In the Life Extension catalogue, there are literally several hundred nutrient supplements which you could purchase. Some of these we have never heard of, and some are simple extracts from foods, herbs, or teas. You can get Life Extension mix with resveratrol which is an antioxidant tablet made from extracts

of red wine and grapes. On the other hand, you could simply drink red wine and get your dose of resveratrol in that manner. In order to improve your muscle mass, you can ingest L-carnitine or you can simply eat good organic protein. You can take shark liver oil, cod liver oil, or flax seed oil and you may or may not realize the promises made about what these will do for your health.

Because there is very little control over what is sold as a nutrient supplement, it is difficult to decide how valid the promises are in terms of what these supplements and nutrients can do. However, we know that if you are marketing a product, you can always give a good bit of “hype” about what it will and will not do. Given our culture’s current circumstances, it is hard to avoid taking supplements and extra nutrients because it seems so logical that this would make a difference and so easy to do. However, the problem is trying to figure out just how many of these 300+ different supplements need to be taken.

In approaching this problem, I think you first have to start with a good nutrient-based diet and eliminate as many non-nutrient foods as possible. This would include white carbs, sugar, transfat, and hydrogenated fat, to name just a few. These create free radicals and cause problems which tax the antioxidants in your body and overwhelm them. Additionally, you have to have a diet that is limited in quantity; otherwise you will overwhelm your body by giving you more free radicals and more fatty tissue. Secondly, after improving the quality and quantity of food, you have to decide what you’re getting and what you’re missing in terms of nutrients. A good general multivitamin, such as Centrum or One-A-Day, furnishes traces of all the elements you might miss in your diet. It has been shown from the China Study that from one geographic area to another, the selenium level in the soil may be lower and the incidence of prostate cancer higher, for example. Therefore, it is important to make sure that you get all of these trace minerals and essential vitamins that your body does not make naturally or that is not provided by your diet.

Besides a multivitamin, the essential fatty acids such as EPA and DHA in fish oil tend to improve the inflammatory process and increase the “good” prostaglandins. By doing this you may reduce your inflammatory response and make diseases such as arthritis, macular degeneration, or heart disease less likely. Even though vitamin D has been around for a long time, no one had known very much about it until they began to correlate the incidence of cancer related to vitamin D levels in people. It has been noted that the higher the latitude, the lower the vitamin D levels, and this certainly makes sense as vitamin D mostly comes from sunshine. Because maintaining an appropriate level of vitamin D is essential to good health, if your vitamin D levels are low you need to be supplemented with Vitamin D3, which will improve you and give you the benefits of this particular vitamin. In addition, you might try “green” supplements or others because this gives you the needed phytochemicals that most of us do not get enough of simply because we don’t get 6 to 8 vegetables a day.

The bottom line is about the same as usual. Eat a good diet with restricted white carbs, keep your weight down, and keep your activity level up. Supplement with a good multivitamin, good red wine, and lots of green vegetables, and you will experience close to the best health that you can. Add extra nutrients as noted and you will be able to live up to your own promise of keeping good health. Try to avoid believing everything that

you read about expectations for certain supplements and nutrients and concentrate on the basics, and you will be better off.