

## Your vitamin cheat sheet Post it on the fridge!

### SURE THINGS

#### Calcium for stronger bones

Despite the WHI findings, scientists agree that the mineral is essential for building healthy bones. Many of the women in the study probably were getting enough calcium from food already or using bone-boosting hormone therapy, so a supplement offered no added benefit.

**Bottom line:** A supplement will be helpful if you don't like dairy, fortified OJ, or other calcium-rich foods like kale. And remember, supplements are absorbed best in small doses—500 milligrams or less.

#### Folic acid for healthy babies

It prevents birth defects in the brain and spine.

**Bottom line:** If pregnancy is a possibility (either now or in the near future) get 400 micrograms every day from fortified cereals, pasta, and bread, or from supplements. Prenatal multivitamins have it, or you can buy folic acid pills. Those may be absorbed better than when you get the nutrient in foods.

#### Iron for energy

The mineral carries energizing oxygen to your cells, but you lose some during your period. Getting fewer than 18 milligrams a day could leave you dragging. (Postmenopausal women need only 8 mg, and pregnant women need 27 mg.)

**Bottom line:** An iron-rich diet—a cup of beans, a serving of lean beef, a cup of spinach, and fortified cereal—makes sense. If you don't eat those foods, try a supplement and talk to your doctor about how much iron is right for you.

### MAYBES

#### Multivitamins for overall health

An NIH expert panel couldn't uncover any persuasive evidence for or against multis. Yet some studies suggest the pills may be useful for preventing cancer, and doctors at Harvard University think all adults should take them.

**Bottom line:** Multivitamins aren't cures, but they are cheap and safe. It's OK to take one daily.

#### Vitamin D for boosting immunity

Already valued as a proven bone-builder, D may have another upside: Large doses—1,000 to 2,000 international units (IU) a day—may bolster your infection defenses while lowering the risk of autoimmune diseases like multiple sclerosis. The recommended daily amount is 200 IU for adults younger than 50. A cup of milk has 100 IU.

**Bottom line:** A supplement may help you tap into D's high-dose potential.

#### Selenium for lowering cancer risk

Ten years after a major study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that 200 micrograms of selenium cut the risk of cancer deaths in half, the issue isn't settled. Most Americans easily get the recommended daily amount (70 micrograms) from meat, fish, eggs, and cereals.

**Bottom line:** You'll need a supplement if you want to reach the 200-microgram mark.

### DON'T BOTHER

#### E for fighting heart disease

A powerful antioxidant that helps protect your body's cells, vitamin E should prevent heart disease by stopping cholesterol from oxidizing, a key step in atherosclerosis. But study after study has found no such benefit. You can get E from nuts, seeds, olive oil, and beans (and most multivitamins).

**Bottom line:** Kicking a smoking habit, exercising, eating more fruits and veggies, and maintaining a healthy weight are the real ways to reduce your risk for heart disease.

#### Beta-carotene for preventing cancer

Your body gets beta-carotene from foods like carrots and squash. Like vitamin E, beta-carotene is a protective antioxidant. And it's been touted as a cancer fighter. But studies show the nutrient actually increases the risk of lung cancer in smokers, while neither helping nor harming nonsmokers.

**Bottom line:** Beta-carotene supplements seem useless. To lower your cancer risks, eat more fruit, vegetables, and whole grains.

#### C for treating colds

Your cuts won't heal, and your cartilage, bones, and teeth won't stay healthy without vitamin C. But there's no clear evidence that C supplements can treat or prevent colds. More than the recommended 75 milligrams a day (easily found in fruits and veggies) may give you just vitamin-rich urine. Very high doses may cause tummy turbulence.

**Bottom line:** Got a cold? Skip the C pills and stick with chicken soup, proven to open your nasal passages and fight inflammation.