



How to Recognize Quality Nutritional Supplements?

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December 20, 2007

As a health product consumer you probably wonder if you're getting what you pay for when purchasing nutritional supplements. How do you measure quality in the supplements you purchase? What do you look for in a supplement? Is the manufacturer using the highest standards available to ensure quality control and consistency? These are a few important considerations to make when purchasing nutritional supplements.

The US lacks industry guidelines for manufacturers of nutritional supplements. In this vacuum, dozens of retailers and multi-level marketing companies sell nutritional products that fail to meet standards voluntarily established and met by several physician-direct brands. Many of these physician-direct brands have stepped in to promote higher safety, consistency, and control. These manufactures go a step further by having their products verified by separate party labs.

Perhaps the most glaring example of quality distinction lies between popular over the counter (OTC) "one a day" multiple vitamin and mineral formulas versus high potency physician grade formulas. Quantity of vitamins and minerals present in popular OTC brands tend to be woefully underrepresented. Crucial biological reactions require key vitamins and minerals to run. A multiple vitamin with sub-optimal levels compromises one's ability to heal or acquire optimal health. Typical OTC brands are manufactured in tablet forms which are difficult to digest and absorb by individuals with digestive issues. Physician grade formulas with few exceptions are made as easy to digest and assimilate capsules free of binders, and unnecessary fillers or allergenic ingredients. The table lists a few ingredients of a physician grade multiple vitamin and mineral formula against a popular OTC brand for comparison.

PHYSICIAN GRADE

CAPSULE	
Vit C	850 mg
Vit D3	800 IU
Vit E	400 IU
B6	15 mg
B12	500 mcg
Calcium	450 mg
Chromium	200 mcg
Selenium	200 mcg
Vanadium	200 mcg

OVER THE COUNTER

TABLET	
Vit C	120 mg
Vit D	400 IU
Vit E	60 IU
B6	4 mg
B12	25 mcg
Calcium	200 mg
Chromium	120 mcg
Selenium	50 mcg
Vanadium	10 mcg

Over the counter formulas are often nonsensical, containing trendy ingredients of little or no proven clinical or anecdotal value. For example popular OTC MVI often contain toxic heavy metals like nickel, platinum and tin in their nutrients.

Sometimes the constituents are properly included but fall far short of a therapeutic dose to be useful. Physician-direct formulas are largely created by industry leading physicians and researchers to produce the best clinical outcome, combining proper ingredients in optimum concentrations. These formulas also represent vitamins in their more highly absorbable forms such as chelates as opposed to poorer quality oxide forms, and natural forms or precursors of vitamins versus their synthetic derivatives.

Test performed by the consumer watch group Consumer Lab show that one in four supplements lack one or more listed ingredients or some other inconsistency. The group recently completed testing the products of forty six different manufacturers. Their findings revealed that eleven of the multiple vitamin and mineral formulas tested have constituents lower than claimed, or had vitamins in levels higher than considered safe. One product was even found to be contaminated with lead. Some readers may remember the seventy deaths that occurred in 1989 when consumers purchased tryptophan contaminated with a toxin. All of the contaminated tryptophan came from a single manufacturer in Japan. These deaths underscore the value of independent laboratory testing and verification of supplement ingredients.

When I see patients in the office for the first time I request they bring all nutritional supplements currently taken. Patients often bring a large bag filled with several products with redundant constituents, poorly suited to the patient, and of questionable quality. Nutritionally-oriented doctors are highly trained in recognizing which nutrients should be included in a nutritional product, which one shouldn't be and in recognizing which products and dietary approaches are best suited to each patient and medical condition. For the benefit of your health and to help you sift through the confusion of choosing the right supplements, visit a naturopathic doctor. Make an appointment now to learn which supplements are right for you.