Understanding Supplement Options

Distinguishing between the many forms of professional supplements becomes less complex once the four categories of supplements available today are defined. Below is a summarization of the basic differences between these categories.

Whole Food Supplements

Many companies tout that their supplements are made from whole foods; however, there are only a few companies that actually can substantiate this claim. Authentic whole food supplements are made with vitamins and minerals delivered in whole food concentrates. The food concentrates selected have been grown in a controlled environment where budding plants are fed a nourishing broth enriched with bioactive peptide carriers. The peptide carriers act as chaperones, which govern a vitamin's or mineral's ability to be transformed into the plant's cellular matrix. Once the plant's natural capacity to store the nutrient within its cells is successfully achieved, the growing process is complete, and harvesting is commenced using proteolytic enzymes to break down the cells' walls, and release the intra-cellular material.

The whole food extract or concentrate produced is rich in a particular vitamin or mineral and is delivered in a synergistic state, with all of the plant's inherent food attachments intact and unadulterated. These attachments are vital co-factors facilitating the body's natural ability to recognize and utilize the nutrients present within the concentrate. Whole food nutrients are recognized by the body as food, and therefore are better utilized and retained by the body when compared to any other supplemental form. Food is the complex form in which all nutrients are found in nature.

Supplements in this category will list the nutrient names vitamin C, folate, calcium, etc., and the mg dosage of each, but they will not denote a fractionated chemical name. Nutrients as they exist in food cannot be listed as one identifiable organic compound in this way, for the reason that they always exist within an interconnected weave of parts, and never as one isolated element. Nutrients in a whole food state will be listed with their food source in the supplement facts panel such as vitamin C (Citrus sinensis).

Food Based

This category of supplements is created from a physical mix of pure, fractionated nutrients with varying amounts of food powders or extracts. There are several different factors that need to be considered when determining the absolute nutritional value of a food based formula. The primary factors that affect the quality of a food based supplement are the amount, variance and form of the foods included in a particular formula. A premium food base formula is one that provides a broad range of unadulterated whole food or plant concentrates (preferred over powders) in at least a 3:1 ratio of food to vitamins and minerals. The broader the range of foods and the higher the ratio of food to nutrients in a formula will significantly improve the bioavailabilty and biological activity of the vitamins and minerals. Delivering isolated vitamins and minerals in a premium food base is an energy-saving process, as the body will not waste vital energy stores to transform the vitamins and minerals into absorbable nutrients. Ascorbic acid is a good example of a chemically synthesized vitamin that has been vastly studied; it has demonstrated enhanced utilization when the nutrient is delivered with its natural co-factors, such as bioflavonoids, rutin and tyrosinase, which always co-exist with vitamin C in food. The utilization factor can be increased by as much as three to five times (from 10% for vitamins in the first category, to 30 - 50% for food based).

To determine if a supplement has a food base, review the label for chemical names (see above), as well as a combination of food extracts or powders. To determine the ratio of nutrients to foods, add up the total milligrams of the listed nutrients and for the food extracts.

Whole Food Supplements

Committed to Whole Food Since 1973

Biocultured Supplements

Biocultured supplements are a physical mix of food, pure isolated nutrients and may have one or more strains of yeast and/or probiotics. Once combined, this mixture is allowed to ferment in a controlled environment. The process of fermentation, also known as culturing, biologically alters the biochemistry and nutrient content of the food. Cultured foods have been shown to have numerous health benefits and have played a role in the diet of many cultures for centuries; however, the body cannot sustain optimal health on cultured foods alone. This is due to the loss of substances, nutrients or compounds that are protective of health, such as vitamin C. Depending on the strains used during the culturing process, the generation or inactivation of toxic substances may also occur. In addition, many proteins and enzymes are denatured during the culturing process, due to the production of one or more acids, resulting in a loss or transformation of biological activity of the nutrients.

Supplements that fall into this category will denote the foods on which the yeast and/or probiotics feed. Not all cultured supplements list the isolated vitamins and minerals used in a particular formula.

Pure, Hypoallergenic or Natural

This is the most prevalent category of professional supplements available today. Contrary to popular belief, the vitamins and minerals used to create supplements in this category are not derived from consumable food or botanical sources. Instead, they are synthetically produced, fractionated or isolated from refined raw materials such as crushed rock, petroleum by-products and organic solvents to produce a pure, crystalline vitamin or mineral analogue. Although the final compound is an analogous structure to a specific vitamin or mineral, it is no longer attached or associated with any of the synergistic co-factors that the nutrient is inherently found with in foods. As a result, pure vitamins and minerals have significantly reduced biological activity and a lower rate of utilization in the body. It is highly advisable to take supplements that fall into this category with a healthy, balanced meal in order to provide the necessary co-factors required for the body to recognize and utilize nutrients in this form, as well as enhance biological activity.

Supplements from this category are readily distinguishable by looking at the supplement facts panel. The vitamins and minerals in the formula will be denoted by a two part chemical name such as vitamin C (ascorbic acid), vitamin A (retinyl palmitate), or calcium (calcium citrate).