

DIETARY FOOD

SUPPLEMENTS – HOPE OR HYPE?

THE GLOBAL DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS MARKET

size was USD 61.20 billion in 2020 and this market is projected to grow from USD 71.81 billion in 2021 to USD 128.64 billion in 2028. Unfortunately, there is very little evidence to support the use of these supplements, and some research has shown that some supplements cause harm.

Human beings are wired to want simple solutions to problems. Dietary supplement manufacture's capitalise on this tendency to sell us 'hype and hope.' There are no rules to stop them from doing so and our tendency to believe what we see and read regularly makes us vulnerable.

Although we know exactly what vitamins and minerals are essential – that is, what nutrients the body cannot make and must get from our diet – that doesn't mean that a dietary supplement that contains them is the same as the real food they come in.

Fresh, nutrient-dense, fibre-filled, and colourful foods hold more than simply vitamins and minerals. They also contain many 100's of phyto-nutrients, which are natural chemicals that are found in plants, thought to be beneficial to human health and help prevent disease. Fruits, vegetables, legumes, grains, nuts and seeds, as well as herbs, teas and spices are known to contain phyto-nutrients. Many researchers believe they are still not all accounted for.

An example of a group of phyto-nutrients is called antioxidants. We find a variety of antioxidants in colourful foods:

- **Red fruits** contain lycopene and vitamin C, very powerful anti-oxidants. Choose watermelon, pink grapefruit, dragonfruit and pomegranates.
- **Purple fruits** contain flavonoids, including resveratrol. Choose raisins, red grapes, blackberries and mulberries.
- **Yellow and orange fruits** (as well as green kiwi fruit) contain carotenoids, such as beta-carotene, lutein and zeaxanthin as well as cryptoxanthin. Beta-carotene is converted into vitamin A, an important brain antioxidant. Choose bananas, mangoes, oranges, paw paws, passionfruit and kiwifruit.

- **Blue foods** contain anthocyanins, along with lutein and zeaxanthin, which defend cells against cancer-forming compounds and prevent neuronal brain degeneration. Choose blueberries and dark cherries – blueberries contain more age-defying and disease-fighting antioxidants than any other vegetables or fruits.

It is impossible for any supplement to replicate any or all these compounds in the way they are found in these foods, or others, such as whole grains, legumes and nuts and seeds. In addition, the combination of specific nutrients may offer us as-yet-undiscovered benefits that cannot be replicated in supplements. And any attempt to extract and/or replicate nutrients in isolation or in combination includes preservatives and other additives.

However, some people have genetic defects that prevent specific nutrients from being made bio-available for use by their brain and body. Specific supplements are then necessary to prevent deficiencies in these nutrients. Specific lifestyle diseases can also benefit from the use of specific supplements, and some people may need more nutrients than others because of age, gender and lifestyle choices. However, it's important to get blood tests done to assess nutrient status before supplementing with specific products, in specific forms.



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