

Archive Newsletter : Originally published May 2003

A fact sheet

In light of today's media attention about the latest FSA report into vitamins and minerals, this fact sheet is given to help our consumers make a more-informed choice over their supplement use; so far, the information that has been made available has a very one-sided slant to it and we would like to present a more balanced and considered point of view.

Chromium

The main target of the FSA seems to be Chromium Picolinate, which – as a form of Chromium – is widely used for helping to maintain blood sugar levels and by many people to help with weight control, as it can improve the functioning of the metabolism, thus increasing calorie burning. It also acts as a catalyst for many enzymes in the body and is an important part of the overall health of the body.

Looking at the report from the Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals (which, despite what is said by the FSA, does not appear to be at all independent), they actually say that Chromium at levels up to 10mg per day is acceptable to take. They exclude Chromium Picolinate from this statement, based on one study that showed results in a test tube that may be harmful to cells. This result has not been repeated in a "real-life" study, and observers are reminded of the various bad science studies that have caused panics like this in the past and then been found to be totally without foundation.

All supplements that contain Chromium Picolinate or other forms of Chromium are unlikely to contain more than 2mg of the compound and that will most likely supply only about 300µg of Chromium. 1µg is 1,000th part of 1mg, so 300µg is only 3% of the 10mg that the FSA say is safe. Until more supportable evidence is presented, Health Plus say that Chromium in whatever form it may come is safe at the recommended intakes. (As with anything, exceeding the suggested intakes is not recommended – after all, too much water can kill you!)

Beta Carotene

Another of today's targets is Beta Carotene; this is based on a study that is nearly 10 years old and which is well-known – researchers used synthetic beta carotene (which is almost non-existent these days, and not used in any Health Plus products) and found that there were possible problems with smokers; but lets not consider the fact that smoking is bad for you anyway. If you're a smoker, don't take synthetic beta carotene, but at the same time if you're a smoker and you're taking supplements, you're not really helping yourself. Stop smoking and you'll feel better.

Vitamin C

This has been attacked before and for the same reasons; if you take too much, you might suffer from loose bowels. This is an effect that has been known about for many, many years, since the days when Linus Pauling was investigating the benefits of this essential nutrient. Linus, who recovered from cancer by his use of vitamin C, used to take 25g per day of vitamin C and lived healthily into his 90's.

Vitamin C has many beneficial effects and plays an important role in many parts of the body – including the immune system. It is the most easily destroyed of all of the vitamins needed for good health and cannot be manufactured in the body; we have to get all we need from our diet (ideally) or from supplements (realistically). Any excess vitamin C that the body does not need is excreted from the body in the usual way – hence the possible loose bowel that is sometimes experienced. Again, at recommended intakes, no supplement user should have any problems. If they do experience loose bowels (and this normally stops after a day or two), then the recommendation is to reduce the intake until the effect disappears. Some vitamin C a day is better than none, after all.

Zinc

There are already guidelines in force within the industry that limit the recommended daily intake of Zinc to 15mg. This sort of intake is definitely needed, as zinc is one of the most deficient minerals in the western world, yet like vitamin C is used extensively by the body, including in the immune system.

As always, the FSA is basing its recommendations on the advice of a panel of independent experts who, on closer examination are perhaps not as independent as the FSA would like us to believe. It is also concerning that whilst alcohol, smoking and pharmaceutical drugs can all have adverse effects, because the Government gets a healthy revenue stream it is allowable. As they do not get so much of an income from supplements, they are trying (again) to kill the industry.