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The Supplements I Take and Why

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Nutritional supplements have been around for a long time. For example, the two oldest companies that currently service our profession are Anabolic Laboratories and Standard Process. Each was family owned some 80 years ago and they remain that way today.

As a child, some 35 years ago, I walked into a health food store for the first time. Supplements and various foods were everywhere, and it occurred to me that taking supplements might be a good idea, particularly if one's diet was not optimal. There was no data to support this view back then, and the oppositional view actually dominated. Accordingly, for most of the past 80 years, nutritional supplements have been characterized as a waste of money, which can only lead to the elimination of expensive urine.

Only within the last ten years has this "anti-supplement" view begun to change. And now, because supplements are generally viewed with more favor, a significant number of people are wondering what supplements they should take. Who are they going to ask? They are likely to ask you, the chiropractor, because they expect you to be more aware of the nutritional research, compared to their medical doctor.

First, I should indicate that very little information suggests that a given disease entity can be treated with a supplement, which then leads to a subsequent cure. Those of us living in the United States and other industrialized nations are dying from chronic degenerative/inflammatory diseases, and drugs don't cure degenerative diseases, and neither do supplements. Degenerative diseases are driven by inappropriate lifestyles, which are typically associated with poor dietary habits and inadequate levels of exercise. All our patients should endeavor to eat properly and exercise everyday; and there are several appropriate supplements that support this effort.

I take a multivitamin/mineral, magnesium/calcium, EPA/DHA, coenzyme Q10, anti-inflammatory herbs (ginger, turmeric, etc.), vitamin D, acetyl-L-carnitine, lipoic acid, glucosamine/chondroitin, and probiotics. A brief explanation for why I take these follows in the remaining paragraphs.

Multivitamins are recommended by researchers at Harvard University (Fletcher and Willet), as well as Dr. Bruce Ames (famous toxicologist), and this is because they are thought to help prevent the development of degenerative disease. Multivitamin/mineral supplements typically contain all the key nutrients that we get from food.

Magnesium is required for over 300 metabolic reactions. Research suggests that, when we become deficient in magnesium, we destabilize the immune and nervous systems, which can lead to inflammation and nervous system hyperexcitability. Numerous diseases have been associated with magnesium deficiency, such as heart disease, syndrome X, type 2 diabetes, and migraine headaches. I take 400-1000 mg, in addition to what is in my multi.

EPA/DHA from fish oil reduces inflammation and is thought to help prevent and treat numerous diseases, such as cancer, heart disease, inflammatory bowel disease, and inflammatory joint disease. Supplementation has been shown to reduce the levels of inflammatory mediators, such as prostaglandins, leukotrienes, thromboxanes, growth factors, and cytokines. I take 1-3 grams per day.

Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10) has become very popular in recent years. CoQ10 functions primarily to produce ATP (adenosine triphosphate), reduce free radicals, and to regulate skeletal muscle gene expression. Nearly every disease studied has been shown to be associated with a reduction in ATP and an increase in free radicals, so I take at least 100 mg per day.

Ginger, turmeric, and other botanicals/ herbs/ spices function like natural versions of drugs like Advil and Celebrex, without any of the side effects. Spices have been shown to reduce NF-kB, cyclooxygenase, and lipoxygenase, which helps to reduce inflammation. I take 1-2 grams per day.

Garlic is perhaps the most well-known herb for reducing inflammation. It is most noted for its heart benefits; and what readers should know is that these benefits are due to garlic's anti-inflammatory activities. I supplement with garlic to achieve at least 5 mg of allicin per day.

Vitamin D has become the subject of much research in recent years, as it is known to have important cell-signaling functions. Numerous diseases are thought to be promoted by a deficiency in vitamin D, such as osteoporosis, heart disease, and cancer. Even musculoskeletal pain can be caused by a deficiency in vitamin D. I take 1000-4000 IU of vitamin D per day.

Acetyl-L-carnitine (ALCAR) and **alpha-lipoic acid** (ALA) have become popular supplements due to the work of Dr. Bruce Ames. He and his colleagues have demonstrated that aging can be slowed or reversed in laboratory animals with these supplements. Ames suggests that humans take 1000 mg of ALCAR and 400 mg of ALA per day, in divided doses, which is what I take. The combination of these substances promotes ATP synthesis and reduces free radicals.

Glucosamine sulfate and **chondroitin sulfate** are known to be of help with osteoarthritis. Their primary effect is to help maintain proteoglycans integrity. I take 1500 mg of glucosamine and 1200 mg of chondroitin per day.

Probiotic supplements typically include lactobacillus acidophilus and bifidobacterium, which have been shown to improve gut health and function. I cycle the use of probiotics during the year. I typically will take probiotics 3-6 months per year.

I take the above, in addition to trying to eat an anti-inflammatory diet. My hope is that the combination will allow me to live well into my 80's or 90's, and maintain the current personal and professional lifestyle I enjoy. I recently met an ex-NIH official who spent most of his career reviewing research grants. He is an MD, PhD and is about 65 years old...lean, healthy, and very sharp-witted. He now runs a privately funded anti-aging research center; and he takes similar supplements to the ones I suggest and for the same reasons outlined above.

The intriguing aspect to anti-inflammatory eating and supplementation is that, no matter if you are symptom-free or sick, the same approach should be taken. Deflaming is the goal, and those with chronic degenerative/inflammatory diseases need to be especially vigilant and committed in their efforts.

Dr. Seaman is the Clinical Chiropractic Consultant for Anabolic Laboratories, one of the first supplement manufacturers to service the chiropractic profession. He is on the postgraduate faculties of several chiropractic colleges, providing nutrition seminars that focus on the needs of the chiropractic patient. He is also a faculty member at Palmer College of Chiropractic Florida, where he teaches nutrition and subluxation theories. He can be reached by e-mail at docseaman@mac.com.

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