Main Line HealthCare

Understanding Vitamin Supplements

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Walk into any local drug store and you will find a full aisle of vitamin supplements. It can be quite overwhelming. Vitamin supplements can provide benefits to your health, but some may be unnecessary or even harmful.

As We Age

Sometimes we don't get adequate nutrition from our food and it's not easy making healthy choices. Some of us face obstacles that interfere with good nutrition such as:

- Dental problems making it difficult to chew
- Problems swallowing
- Difficulty eating or preparing meals because of a medical condition
- Declining taste and smell because of age
- Medications or depression that affect your appetite

If any of these are affecting your eating habits, please talk to your physician. Most general multivitamins are adequate and safe; your doctor can review any special problems or suggest a consultation with a registered dietician for more complicated dietary problems. Talk to your doctor about the right supplements and dosages for you. Take a close look at whether you have adequate levels of two vitamins, B12 and D.

Vitamin B12

As we age, some people lose their ability to absorb this important vitamin from the foods we eat.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D protects against osteoporosis and helps you to absorb calcium. There is recent evidence that it also helps to protect your heart. Our primary source of this vitamin is sunlight. In Philadelphia there may not be enough sunlight in the winter months to produce Vitamin D.

On the other hand, too much of a certain vitamin may be harmful, such as Vitamin A, which may cause nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea if taken in excess. Or, Vitamin K, which may interfere with a medication named Warfarin.

I encourage you to talk to your doctor about the right vitamins for you!