

26 July 2012

Virginia Larson
Editor
North & South
AUCKLAND

Dear Ms Larson

RE: SUPPLEMENT FEATURE – JULY EDITION

The feature on health supplements in your July issue painted a very dim view of the need for supplementation.

Unfortunately, not all diets are created equally.

While the best way to get vitamins and minerals is through your food, given our modern diet and lifestyles, many people are lacking in essential nutrients and need supplementation to maintain good health.

Some nutrients such as selenium are not even accessible through diet due to the very low levels of the mineral in New Zealand soil.

Supplements are crucial for maintaining good health in some situations. For instance vegetarians and vegans are generally lacking in Vitamin B12 (essential for normal brain and nervous system functioning and for the formation of blood) because it is only found in animal products. Iron supplementation is highly recommended for the treatment of anaemia. Older people may require more nutrients because of a reduced physiological ability to absorb them. And we already know that more than one third of New Zealanders are either deficient in Vitamin D or below recommended levels because they are not getting sufficient sunlight. This can lead to bone mineral deficiencies and, in the worst case, rickets. Taking folic acid supplements before conception and during early pregnancy is recommended by the Ministry of Health.

What this highlights is that we don't all live the perfect lifestyle with a nutritionally balanced diet. Taking supplements, for many, is the only way to ensure they lead a healthy life.

While being able to eat summer fruit all year round is appealing, the imported fruit and vegetables sitting on supermarket shelves in New Zealand will be lacking in nutritional value. The nutrients in most fresh fruit and vegetables start to diminish as soon as they're picked so add to that the freezing, chilling and chemical sprays, your peach might look good but it possibly won't taste good and it certainly won't contain much nutritional benefit.

While we have been faithfully eating our fresh fruit and veges the quality of the nutritional value has significantly deteriorated over the last 30 to 50 years. Due to growing our produce bigger and faster, accompanied by synthetic fertilisers and chemical sprays, the plants do not absorb as many nutrients from the soil.

Robust research here and overseas continues to provide strong science based evidence of the therapeutic benefits of taking various supplements.

New Zealand's leading supplements manufacturers base their products on comprehensive research and, where possible, clinical trials. When purchasing a recognised brand, consumers can be confident that products are safe and what's on the label is actually in the bottle.

While the Government is currently formulating a New Zealand regulatory system for natural health products, including supplements, most of Natural Products New Zealand's members (which make up over 80% of the industry) are already manufacturing to Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) standards and stringent international standards.

Natural Products NZ has been working with the Government on the Natural Health Products Bill and welcomes a strong and sensible regulatory scheme that ensures quality, safety and efficacy for manufacturers and consumers.

In an ideal world, we would all receive sufficient nutrients from our diet but supplementation has, and will continue to, provide relief from a range of health issues and is essential for optimum levels of health.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Palmer
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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