

# Guide to Supplements and Superfoods

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## Key Points

Optimum health is our birthright

## Further reading and resources

In Defence of Food, Michael Pollan

Food is better Medicine than Drugs Jerome Burne & Patrick Holford

Farms for the Future available on; <http://www.viddler.com/explore/PermaScience/videos/4/>

## Details of appropriate professional bodies

*Institute of Optimum Nutrition (ION), UK*

*The Hippocrates Health Institute, US*

## Why food is not enough?

Hippocrates famously said ‘Let food be thy medicine’ and this is never more true than now in a world awash with chemicals where our bodies are under assault not only from external toxins but from denatured, processed foods. A good diet is the baseline and should consist of a balanced, wholefood diet, with plenty of water. But there may be several reasons why this may not be enough. Firstly the denatured food that we eat, secondly stress which impinges so much on our modern lives and finally our genetic inheritance.

## Diet

Our relationship with food has totally changed in the 200 years or so since the Industrial Revolution and particularly in the last 50 years of the supermarket monopoly. We no longer have any connection with its production. We don’t know the farmer/producer, we are simply consumers of ‘food products’ (some bear very little relation to real food), purchasing items from supermarkets with abundant choice but little discernment. We are targeted by clever marketing campaigns to buy too much (3 for 2, etc) and throw a lot of it away (up to 40% is the UK figure). Storage and production requirements denudes the food of its nutrients.

A lot of the food purchased at supermarkets is old (apples can have been in storage for a year) to cater for the all year-round demand (in the recent past food was much more seasonal – and the right food was eaten depending on the body’s needs e.g. root vegetables in the autumn/winter for warming/building up food stores in our bodies. Few of use would have eaten pesticide-sprayed, halogen gas purified bags of salad in December! Of course there are alternatives and some of us seek out farmer’s markets for fresher, seasonal produce but this is seen as luxury as the prices are much higher.

Modern agriculture has also denuded the soil to the point where it is simply no longer able to grow crops without regular sprays of pesticides and fertilisers (if you doubt this watch the DVD ‘Farm for the Future see left). Any gardener will tell you the soil is key. What goes into the soil comes out in the food we grow in it. Most vegetables contain a fraction of the vitamins and minerals they once did so simply eating more fruit and veg as the government’s 5 a day campaign urges us is not enough to get us to optimal health. Plus, of course it is contaminated with chemicals so it is important to increase the amount of organic/home-grown veg you eat. Vitamin and mineral levels in food are simultaneously declining, in which depletion of soil nutrients by intensive agriculture is a factor. Levels in our tissues follow close behind.

1. We evolved over millions of years requiring a high calorie diet. Man was physically active requiring energy to keep warm, hunt, gather, fish and fight. Modern man is a lounge lizard by comparison. We simply do not need to eat as much. Because we eat less calories (about a third less than the Victorians even<sup>1</sup>), we eat fewer vitamins, minerals and essential fatty acids which would accompany those calories.
2. There is a one way cycle of trace elements from the soil, into plants and animals, into us, then out into the sea. We are not recycling composted human sewage onto the land and so we are out of balance. Trace elements in the soil are being depleted and not replaced, so we too are becoming deficient.
3. Plants cannot absorb trace elements directly from the soil. They rely on fungi called mycorrhiza which cover the root hairs, absorb soil water and trace elements and put them into a bioavailable form for the plants to absorb. Artificial nitrogen and pesticides kill mycorrhiza and so chemical farming gives us malabsorbing plants.

4. Plants grown on chemical fertilisers grow rapidly and outstrip their trace element supplies. For example cows put on such 'flushed' grass may develop 'staggers' – brought on by acute magnesium deficiency.
5. We tend to eat foods which have been processed, so many nutrients are lost, and these losses are accelerated by sugars, caffeine, alcohol and other such legal poisons (as enjoyable as they may be!).
6. We are increasingly exposed to toxins which require vitamins and minerals for their excretion. These toxins effectively increase our needs for all nutrients. The commonest cause for iron deficiency anaemia in this country is tea drinking. Tea contains tannin which binds (chelates) trace elements including iron and so blocks their absorption. More obvious toxins include pesticide residues, lead, mercury (in fillings), cadmium (smoking), aluminium (water), volatile organic compounds (VOC's perfumes, solvents, exhaust fumes) and so on - a seemingly endless list.

### Stress

The rate of human evolution is accelerating all the time. We are all called upon to make changes to our lives all the time. This is very stressful. Western man has probably never been so stressed on an everyday basis than before and this increases nutritional demands<sup>ii</sup>

You may think you are not a stressed person, but you forget the hidden stresses. We as humans developed in a society that was relatively small, with tight-knit extended families, where there was a controlled relationship with the earth, food supply, & each other. Compare that with the sort of lives we lead today. Bills, deadlines, work stress, family break-ups, excess work, car driving, frequent air travel, mobile phones, lack of community ties, indoor lifestyles depriving us of exercise, Vitamin D and exposing us to large chemical/electromagnetic pollution, you name it our lives are absolutely *packed* with stress. And because everyone else is doing it we take it as normal and expect our bodies to cope. Well, they do to a point but eventually, particularly as we get older, things begin to take their toll. Immune function starts to drop, stress can lead to depression and anxiety, we develop addictions and intolerances and many of us get really ill.

### Biochemical individuality and requirements

You may think we are all alike – the notion of the Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) quoted on food packets suggests as long as we consume particular amounts of carbs, fats, proteins and vitamins and minerals we will all automatically be ok. Unfortunately these amounts are calculation based on average populations not individuals. Within populations people vary tremendously in what they need and require. You won't know this until you either get tested (via a nutritional therapist) to see the levels of various markers in your blood/urine. Simply taking a large number of supplements without targeting them to your needs is rather like firing bullets at a target indiscriminately and hoping one hits the bullseye. Another way is to take a health profile which looks at your symptoms and helps to build up a picture of the likely deficiencies from simple deficiency symptoms. There are several on the web. It is likely that there is an interplay of deficiencies which build the symptomatic picture. The body is a complex web of interactions with food and nutrients acting *synergistically*. In naturopathic medicine we cannot deduce symptom A is due to deficiency in nutrient B. But working with a skilled nutritionist or the results of your profile you can make simple changes which enhance your wellbeing and *progressively increase the ability of your body to heal itself*.

Latest research also shows the genetic variability is not just inbuilt – it is responsive to environment – so called **epigenetics** is a rapidly developing new field. For instance, many of us carry genetic polymorphisms (alterations in the sequence of bases in the DNA) which make us less able to handle and excrete toxins, or can exacerbate or prolong inflammation (e.g. in eczema or asthma). Chronic inflammation predisposes to a range of diseases including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, psychological disorders and neurodegenerative diseases. These may also be linked to the genes that are switched on.

## **The solutions;**

### **1. Supplements**

**Quality** is important. Most supermarket supplements are chemically manufactured and not necessarily in balance with other enhancing vitamins/ chemicals as they would be in natural foods. A good vitamin/mineral supplement will be in a form that the body can absorb in synergy with other elements that enhance absorption – this is critical as for many people their absorption is very poor so most vitamins are excreted rather than taken into the body. So, choose a good make and get advice if you have any specific problems. Most people would benefit from a good vitamin/mineral multi, extra fish oils (a high amount of EPA/DHA is important), and extra B vitamins from kelp or Brewer's yeast.

For specific problems you may need short-term supplementation with specific singular vitamins/minerals to rectify any underlying problems. A good nutritional therapist could help you with this. It is amazing that a lot of chronic illnesses like IBS, diabetes, eczema, allergies, etc can be treated in this way without recourse to pharmaceutical drugs – though of course if you are already on medication most can be taken alongside. We do not recommend you stop taking your prescribed medicines but work with your GP to reduce them when you feel able. Some GP's are taking nutritional interventions on board, others are still not convinced (GP's typically receive little if any nutritional education when studying medicine). If you find you are not being taken seriously then find another GP!

### **Superfoods**

This has a very specific meaning which varies depending who is using the term! For supermarkets it often means high price foods like blueberries – which, whilst full of good things are simply another means of getting you to part with your money. You would get more nutrition by picking blackcurrants from the hedgerow! For Raw Foodists (people who eat exclusively raw, natural foods) they refer to foods that are especially high in energy-giving vits and minerals but are often needed in very small amounts – added as powders to juices and other life-giving foods. Examples are Macca, raw cacao, spirulina and goji berries. We would recommend these highly but, again, they are not a substitute for a poor diet and to get the full value you need to research the underlying principles of raw food eating and maybe sign up for a course.

### **Turmeric – The Ancient Indian Herb That Supports Your Body's Ability to Cleanse**

For thousands of years, turmeric has played a major healing role in Ayurvedic medicine. It is composed primarily of a chemical known as curcumin, which helps produce bile in your liver. Bile is a critical part of the detoxification process.

#### **Curcumin: Turmeric's Key to Blocking Toxins**

Turmeric has a long history of being used to support the liver when adrenal fatigue or cirrhosis is reported. It has been found to block harmful toxins which helps reduce the burden on the liver.

Ground turmeric has been found to contain a higher amount of curcumin than whole turmeric. The Indian practice of cooking turmeric with pepper seems to help release the active ingredients and raw turmeric is also potent.

#### **Curcumin and Turmeric for Adrenal Fatigue**

“Turmeric is thought to reduce inflammation by lowering histamine levels and it may also stimulate the adrenal glands to increase production of a hormone that reduces inflammation .”<sup>iii</sup>

#### **Turmeric's Herbal Achievements<sup>iv</sup>**

- Lowers cholesterol

- Blocks the production of HIV<sup>i</sup>
- Improves protein digestion
- Reduces uterine tumors
- Dissolves gallstones
- Increases ligament flexibility
- Reduces menstrual pain
- Is a powerful anti-cancer agent preventing angiogenesis and promoting apoptosis<sup>v</sup>

### How Can You Use Turmeric?

When using turmeric to benefit your health you will need to purchase high quality, organic, filler-free herbal preparations that come in a vegetable-based capsule. Be sure to steer clear of supplements that have dangerous additives like magnesium stearate (also know as stearic acid) – which actually could be a toxic metal by-product of pill production.<sup>vi</sup>

You can definitely enjoy the spice in your cooking, but the most health benefits are going to come from more therapeutic doses.

- Ask your natural medical practitioner about Curcumin extracts for extended toxin blocking effects
- Make turmeric tea by boiling the root or powder for 10-15 minutes, straining and enjoying with cinnamon and liquid stevia
- Make a turmeric paste with water and apply directly to your skin for relief of skin ailments
- Use liberally in warm mineral broths and soups
- Sprinkle on your steamed quinoa with lemon juice, sea salt and cumin
- Try some fresh turmeric blended into your raw soup or smoothie
- Add to raw milk (along with cinammon) to make it more digestible and reduce mucus production

Detoxification is absolutely necessary for achieving balance within your body, and for naturally treating a number of ailments, including cirrhosis of the liver and adrenal fatigue. This ancient spice is just one more tool available to all health-conscious individuals eager to improve your quality of life.

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<sup>i</sup> Article on the Victorian diet by Paul Pitchford

<sup>ii</sup> Dr Sarah Myhill drmyhillcom

<sup>iii</sup> "Turmeric Benefits - Benefits of Turmeric - Side Effects of Turmeric." Optimal Health with Nutritional Supplements and Dietary Supplements. Web. 06 June 2010. <<http://www.nutritional-supplement-educational-centre.com/turmeric-benefits.html>>.

<sup>iv</sup> Pitchford, Paul. "Healing with Whole Foods: Asian ..."

<sup>v</sup> David Servan-Schreiber The Anti-Cancer Diet

<sup>vi</sup> Well-being, Honoring The. "Turmeric - Organic Indian Ayurvedic Healing Herb." Organic India Health Products and Supplements. Web. 01 June 2010. <<http://organicindia.mercola.com/herbal-supplements/turmeric.aspx>>.