

Supplements

At times one keeps wondering, what happened to the age old tablet of Vitamin B complex so frequently given and looked upon by the patient as an energizer. Three decades ago that was one of the most commonly dispensed medicine if we may call it that way. With each prescription of almost any drug, let it be an antibiotic, analgesic etc. this yellow tablet used to be a common adjuvant. Have we seen it being prescribed or taken by the patient as much or with any enthusiasm. Is it that the patients have become more demanding or the doctors feel that something greater than the simpler vitamin needs to be given or is it that the technology has brought to us something that we feel should be a must to prescribe. Man has always thought beyond what was available to him. That is the way progress has been made, not satisfied with the existing, always looking beyond. Now if we extend our search to look at the food supplements brought out in the market, it would be found that in the recent years a number of them have found a way into the pharmaceutical industry. The industry is pushing them very hard into the market with a lot of pressure on the doctors to prescribe them and creating a 'need' in the patients to take them. Good examples are various 'purified' or 'active' forms of vitamins and other essential nutrients and minerals etc. The arguments given are that these act faster or absorbed better or the body does not require processes or complicated metabolic cycles to make it 'available' to the tissue or the cells where it is needed. For the sake of preventing a defamation allegation from the promoters of such nutrients, I would not like to name them but each one of us is quite familiar with these and would understand the meaning of my write up as we read further. Does the body really need these. Do we really need the refined or the active forms like this. It appears that 'waves' of some form or the other keep coming in the health promotion cycles. Do we require supplements in the normal course of our health and fitness, if we keep taking our balanced diets, unless we have a specific deficiency. If we read the literature about the treatment of osteoporosis or prevention of osteoporosis the amount of calcium recommended is pretty high. Do we give all the recommended calcium in the form of supplements or do we take into account the amount being taken in the diet as well. Accordingly the requirement of supplementation reduces. In my practice I have always done it and in my teachings I have promoted this concept. Finding out what is lacking in the diet and supplementing it till required with the minimum burden

on the pocket of the patient and still getting good results as monitored on the follow up DEXA scans. There have been patients who have complained and others who have commended prescriptions of lesser items, specially supplements. One of the best remarks that reinforces this thought is a comment by a patient that it is rare to find an allopathic doctor not write drugs and suggest only dietary modifications and still get relief. The question is that the body knows what it has to do unless there is an inborn error of metabolism or it has got some altered functioning because of a disease or the deficiency of a particular nutrient, that is when we may resort to these. A food item available in tomatoes is now being promoted to a great extent. If we analyze the Indian cooking use of tomatoes in the style of cooking can make available the nutrient to an adequate quantity that may be needed for the body to give the protection required. I am reminded of a quote written at the end of an engineering book where a mention was made about the inventions done and marketed. Man evolved from the jungles. It used to do hunting and a lot of labor in search of food. Now as civilized human beings if we look at ourselves not far but just beyond 30 years, we used to walk to our schools and work places or cycle most of the times if not taking buses. Car was invented long ago and a need was created so much to have a car to convenience us. We tried to earn more to pay for the car by putting extra labor or extra hours of work. We lost the exercise by being more at work and while driving the car. We got disuse syndrome and the visits to the doctors increased with lifestyle diseases after a while. Doctors prescribed exercises and walking. Keeping this in view, a need was created by the advertisers to have the best exercise over a treadmill rather than walking normally. Many invested further to buy a treadmill and worked more in the office to pay for the treadmill. If we think and analyze for ourselves what happened in the end. There was a need for walking but we bought the car but could not dispense with walking but still bought a treadmill to walk because both machines were promoted hard by the market whether really needed or not. Let's apply the same principle to the supplements and think whether the real food was good enough or we should have refined supplements. Let's think again before prescribing any supplement if there was an actual need or a created 'need.' Let us not forget that the body is smart enough.

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