

# Make sure multi-vitamin delivers what you need

**Q** I loved your column about vitamins for brain health (June 28), but I can't swallow a multiple vitamin-mineral pill. I take a gummy vitamin. Is that OK? BH, Winterville

**A** That's a great question. I do hope everyone talks with their doctor and/or registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) before starting or stopping any dietary supplement. I



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asked Jenna Hamed, the second-year medical student learning more about nutrition with Kay Craven and her nutrition team at ECU Health and the Brody School of Medicine to check out the differences between gummy and tablet multiple vitamins.

Of course, gummies and tablets are generally safe to use. The important question is, does the gummy and/or the tablet have the nutrients you need? Another question is does your body use the vitamins and minerals in the gummy delivery the same, better or worse than delivered in a tablet? Unfortunately, there is no simple answer when it comes to multiple vitamin-mineral supplements. There is pretty good evidence about how the body uses the tablet vitamin, but few published studies about how the body uses nutrients delivered in a gummy.

One of our talented Laupus Librarians, Jamie Bloss, found us one small study of a single nutrient to review. The researchers suggested the vitamin D from one brand of gummy was absorbed just a bit better than from the same brand's tablet. But the studies of other nutrients have mixed results. We didn't find a study that directly compared multiple vitamin tablets and gummies. Be we die study the Supplement Facts labels of one brand of gummies with the tablets of the same brand.

The gummy had noticeably lower amounts of some of vitamins and minerals than the tablet. Those included vitamins A, B6, B12 and E, iodine, calcium and biotin. For brain health, we wrote that vitamin B12 was an important nutrient (June 28). We couldn't possibly compare all the products for sale in Eastern North Carolina, but here are a couple of examples.

We looked at the amount of B12 in Centrum Silver Tablets Women and it was listed as 50 mcg. The amount in the Centrum



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Gummies and Adults was half as much or 25 mcg. We found 6 mcg of vitamin B12 in "Nature's Bounty Gels For Her" and 12 mcg in Nature's Bounty Gummies with Omega 3s.

You don't necessarily need to buy the product with the most in it. The amount of vitamin B12 adult women need is only 2.6 mcg per day, but most experts recommend getting at least 25 mcg since B12 is not absorbed well by older adults. The bottom line is you need to make sure you get the nutrients you are looking for in the brand and type of vitamin-mineral you buy.

You actually should check the ingredient and Supplement Facts label every time you buy it. The formulas seem to change often depending what nutrient has been getting a lot of attention. Also, carefully read the information about products claiming to be nootropics. The term nootropic describes a wide variety of substances with actions thought to improve human thinking, learning and memory. Sometimes products with ingredients where the human need is still unknown are marketed as "supporting brain health."

Currently, those ingredients are polyphenol grape extract, ginkgo, ashwagandha and acetyl L carnitine. We found they might also have vitamins B6 and B12 added, which we know are needed for brain health. Be careful that you get what you are paying for. Since we don't know a lot about the effects of taking brain health supplements,

it might be better to take vitamins B6 and B12 which we know are necessary, rather than supplements of unknown benefit or harm.

**Q** It's been six months since I lost my taste and smell with COVID-19. Will it ever come back? I just am not interested in eating. Any advice? JM, Ayden.

**A** Scientists say there is still a lot to learn about recovering taste and smell lost due to COVID. But we do know that until you are interested in eating you still need to make sure you are meeting your nutrient and calorie needs. My best advice, especially if you are unintentionally losing weight, is to have a consultation with a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) who can help you plan a way to get the nutrition you need. I don't have much to add to the advice about getting back your taste and smell (check out my April 7, 2021, column in the Reflector online archives). It appears that most people will regain taste and smell. But sadly, seven in 100 people may not regain that joy in eating. There are clinician-researchers actively looking for a procedure that might help regain taste and smell, but to my knowledge, none are available outside the research setting right now. Stay tuned.

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