

[IMAGE]

Choosing the Right Multivitamin for Your Children

By Dr. Richard Drucker

From the Flintstones to the Gummi Bears, cartoon vitamins may seem like a fun, easy way to encourage children to take nutritional supplements. But do they give your child the nutrients they truly need? Get the truth about cartoon vitamins and their impact on your child's health.

Children have a greater need for proper and more complete nutrition than do adults. That is a fact. So, why do we give our kids cartoon-shaped sugar pills containing synthetic vitamins? Proper nutrition is vital for the development of teeth, bones and muscles, as well as neuro-cognitive, immune-system and many other important functions. It also should serve as a primary defense against chronic diseases. But are your children getting the nutrition they need? Let's first understand a child's daily requirements for vitamins and nutrients.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently revised its long-standing food pyramid to illustrate that a healthy balance of the food groups is required, along with daily physical exercise. Visit www.mypyramid.gov and you'll find a number of educational tools to help fit a nutritional plan to your specific child.

Child hanging from a jungle-gym. - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark Also trying to help ensure our kids get adequate nutrition is the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It publishes guidelines for the recommended daily intake of 25 vitamins and minerals. These guidelines appear most commonly as U.S. RDAs (Recommended Daily Allowances) on food labels. All manufacturers of food sold in the U.S. are required to accurately state the percentage RDA per serving on its labels.

To understand how a child *should* be eating, let's start with the FDA's RDA of vitamins and minerals. It segregates needs based on two age groups: ages 2 to 3, and ages 4 to adult. In our case study, we modeled a 6-year-old girl's daily needs. Next, we visited the food pyramid to obtain recommended foods from the various food groups in the appropriate proportions. We came up with a list of foods for a single day's diet (**Table 1**). This set of food selections should yield a good nutritional base for our 6-year-old girl.

FOOD ISN'T ENOUGH: Why Children Need A Multivitamin		
TABLE 1		
Recommended Daily Diet for a 6-Year-Old Girl		
1,400 calories, 30-60 minutes of exercise		
Food Group	Item	Amount
Grains		
Need: 5 ounces	Cornflakes	1 cup
	Whole wheat crackers	5 crackers
	White rice	1 cup
	Popcorn	3 cups
Vegetables		
Need: 1.5 Cups	Green beans	cup
	Baby carrots	1 cup
Fruits		
Need: 1.5 Cups	Banana	1 medium
	Strawberries	cup
Food Group	Item	Amount
Milk		
Need: 2 Cups	Milk	1 cup
	Cheddar cheese, shredded	1/3 cup
Meat and Beans		
Need: 4 ounces	Chicken breast, roasted	3 oz
	Cashews, roasted	1 oz (18 nuts)
Fats and Oils		
Limit: 4 tsp	Cashews	2 t oil
	Popcorn	2 t oil
<i>Source: USDA Nutrient Data Laboratory, www.mypyramid.com.</i>		

The pyramid recommends that our 6-year-old limit extra fats and sugars to less than 170 calories per day. We calculated the vitamins and minerals in these food selections, and mapped them against the RDA values for vitamins and minerals. What did we find? Take a look at **Table 2**.

In this example, our 6-year-old girl achieves the recommended daily amount of *only six* of the 25 FDA-tracked nutrients. She is left woefully deficient in the remainder, including some of the most important. The nutrients are listed in the order mandated by the FDA, which is supposed to reflect the relative importance of each item.

This exercise illustrates that even using the available tools and guidelines to design a well-balanced daily diet, the average parent will likely end up providing meals to their child with nutritional shortfalls. In fact, even the most able nutritionist would be challenged. Consider that most parents have schedules that force them to take advantage of the conveniences of pre-prepared meals, drive thrus and highly processed foods. Unfortunately, poor dietary habits in children are the norm, not the exception.

TABLE 2				
RDA of Nutrients Based on Recommended Daily Diet				
6-Year-Old Girl, 1,400 calories, 30-60 minutes of exercise				
Vitamin/Mineral	RDA	Units	Totals	% RDA
	Age 4 +			Age 4+
Vitamin A	5,000	IU	13,469	269%
Vitamin C	60	mg	63	105%
Calcium	1,000	mg	761	76%
Iron	18	mg	14	79%
Vitamin D	400	IU	142	36%
Vitamin E	30	IU	1	5%
Vitamin K	80	mcg	20	25%
Thiamin (Vitamin B1)	1.5	mg	1	67%
Riboflavin (Vitamin B2)	1.7	mg	1	79%
Niacin (Vitamin B3)	20	mg	21	107%
Pyrodoxine (Vitamin B6)	2	mg	2	113%
Folate	400	mcg	310	78%
Vitamin B12	6	mcg	3	53%
Biotin	300	mcg	0	0%
Pantothenic Acid (Vitamin B5)	10	mg	4	38%
Phosphorus	1,000	mg	1,121	112%
Iodine	150	mcg	0	0%
Magnesium	400	mg	241	60%
Zinc	15	mg	7	49%
Selenium	70	mcg	60	85%
Copper	2	mg	1	48%
Manganese	2	mg	2	101%
Chromium	120	mcg	0	0%
Molybdenum	75	mcg	0	0%
Chloride	3,400	mg	0	0%
Calories	1,400		1,276	91%
<i>Source: USDA Nutrient Data Laboratory, www.mypyramid.com.</i>				

A large study published in the journal *Pediatrics* monitored more than 3,000 children and showed that only 1 percent of the children met the recommendations for the food pyramid. This same study indicated these children were low in vitamin B₆, iron, calcium, zinc and fiber.

Let's look again at our 6-year-old's diet and map the nutritional value of what a typical 1st grader might eat in a day:

Breakfast: 1 cup Fruity O's cereal, 1 cup 2 percent milk

Lunch: 1 cup fruit juice, 4 chicken nuggets, 1/2 cup green beans, 1 banana

Snack: 1 cup tortilla chips (cheese flavor), fruit snack

Dinner: 1 slice pizza, 12-oz lemon-lime soda, 1 brownie

Now let's look at how that daily diet affects our 6-year-old's daily nutritional profile. As shown in **Table 3**, our 1st grader, aided by highly processed and fortified food selections, achieved her RDA for one more (seven) of the 25 nutrients, but has consumed *50 percent* more calories than the USDA recommends for her age. We also should be concerned with the additional sugar and fats associated with these menu choices.

TABLE 3				
RDA of Nutrients in Typical Daily Diet				
6-Year-Old Girl (1 st Grader)				
Vitamin/Mineral	RDA	Units	Totals	% RDA
	Age 4 +			Age 4+
Vitamin A	5,000	IU	1,993	40%
Vitamin C	60	mg	144.7	241%
Calcium	1,000	mg	819.8	82%
Iron	18	mg	16.01	89%
Vitamin D	400	IU	98	25%
Vitamin E	30	IU	3.11	10%
Vitamin K	80	mcg	19.8	25%
Thiamin (Vitamin B ₁)	1.5	mg	1.754	117%
Riboflavin (Vitamin B ₂)	1.7	mg	1.815	107%
Niacin (Vitamin B ₃)	20	mg	24.495	122%
Pyrodoxine (Vitamin B ₆)	2	mg	2.874	144%
Folate	400	mcg	263.3	66%
Vitamin B ₁₂	6	mcg	3.629	60%
Biotin	300	mcg	0	0%
Pantothenic Acid (Vitamin B ₅)	10	mg	4.137	41%
Phosphorus	1,000	mg	1,273	127%
Iodine	150	mcg	0	0%
Magnesium	400	mg	211	53%
Zinc	15	mg	11.151	74%
Selenium	70	mcg	72.9	104%
Copper	2	mg	0.697	35%
Manganese	2	mg	1.285	64%
Chromium	120	mcg	0	0%
Molybdenum	75	mcg	0	0%
Chloride	3,400	mg	0	0%
Calories	1,400		2,096	150%
<i>Source: USDA Nutrient Data Laboratory, www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search.</i>				

The correct conclusion to this data analysis is that we must supplement our children's diets, because it is virtually impossible for them to consistently eat the right combination of foods to provide their necessary nutrition. For this reason, knowledgeable health care and nutrition professionals recommend vitamin supplements for children.

Where does a parent turn, but to their local grocery or pharmacy shelf? There, they will find all manner of cute and cuddly candy-like multivitamins. They will review the labels to select one that appears to have a full spectrum of what's missing from their child's diet.

So, this should be the end of this article ... but it's not. What's wrong with cartoon vitamins? A study of the available products reveals startling, problematic results. They contain synthetic vitamins, inadequate minerals, as well as binders, preservatives and sugar - some of the very items we need the supplements to combat in the first place! Yet those items are listed first in the ingredient section of the cartoon vitamin label. Unfortunately, the primary consumers for these products (parents) are untrained in how to interpret the labels. The most glaring problems include:

- The formulas are incomplete.
- They contain synthetic vitamins: chemically derived substances that are supposed to mimic the natural form, but in fact are like mirror-image opposites.
- Processed sugar is used to flavor the pills to increase compliance, but most kids already get too much sugar in their daily diets.
- To get the vitamins to hold their cute shapes, manufacturers use binders, which are non-natural chemical additives.

We need to provide our kids with the kind of nutritional supplements informed adults demand:

- All-natural, with no synthetic chemical nutrients.
- Derived from whole foods.
- Complete and balanced formula, meaning they should contain at least the 25 FDA-recommended nutrients, preferably more.
- Good taste to ensure compliance, but without added sugar. Liquids are best, as they absorb better and the dosing can be modified, depending on the child's size and needs.
- Need to contain the full spectrum of organic trace minerals.

What is the solution? In this case, unfortunately, there aren't many good ones. Randy Miles, a certified nutritionist and co-owner of Family Health Market in Frisco, Texas, does not recommend any children's multivitamin product. Rather, he uses their best liquid adult's formula and reduces the dosage for children. "Multivitamin supplements for children are in a segment that is virtually ignored. What you find are products containing only the bare minimum of nutrients and also alarmingly include titanium and aluminum." Miles continues, "Cartoon vitamins are all that is out there, so many pediatricians recommend them, but it's more about marketing to the kids than it is about nutrition."

The proof is in the pudding. Today's children face more obstacles to good health than just poor nutrition. Our kids are exposed to more toxins, pollution and stress than those in one or two generations prior. They're dealing with free-radical damage and oxidative stress daily and in higher amounts. Air pollution, water pollution, pesticides, preservatives, radiation, smoke, fatty foods and stress are factors that raise free-radical levels. These free radicals increase risks of degenerative diseases, as they cause cellular and tissue damage within the body.

There is a great need for diets rich in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants to combat the free-radical damage. Children receiving the right amount and combination of these minerals and vitamins are better able to counteract the effects of the extra toxins they might face. It is absolutely a must for them to strengthen their armor with a healthy diet high in fruits and vegetables, and low in processed foods and sugars. Then, we must augment that effort with the very best supplements available. Our kids deserve better health than their parents, but unless we do something, they are fighting an uphill battle.

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