

Scientific review points to supplement users engaging in a pattern of healthy habits

6 February 2014

Dietary supplement users take these products as just one component of a larger effort to develop a healthier lifestyle, according to a newly published review in *Nutrition Journal*, a peer-reviewed scientific publication. The review, "Health Habits and Other Characteristics of Supplement Users" (*Nutrition Journal*.2014, 13:14), co-authored by Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN) consultant Annette Dickinson, Ph.D., and CRN's senior vice president, scientific and regulatory affairs, Duffy MacKay, N.D., examined data from 20 peer-reviewed scientific journal articles and found that, "overall, the evidence suggests that users of dietary supplements are seeking wellness and are consciously adopting a variety of lifestyle habits that they consider to contribute to healthy living."

"Compiling the available data on the [health habits](#) of [dietary supplement](#) users, we gained a sharper insight into the positive lifestyle choices of this large segment—one half to two-thirds—of the American population that takes supplements," Dr. Dickinson said. "Evidence from numerous surveys shows that dietary supplement users are more likely than non-users to adopt a number of positive health-related habits such as consuming healthier diets, exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy body weight, and avoiding tobacco products."

The review indicated that Americans who take dietary supplements are focused on wellness for the long term. Dr. MacKay observed, "Dietary supplement users typically make healthful habits part of each day, and many stick with their supplement regimen for years. Their supplement use doesn't appear to be something trendy, but more of a planned strategy they maintain for the long haul."

The results of this review counter concerns that dietary supplement users are operating under a "halo effect" or are somehow short-changing themselves, eating poorly, using the remote control for exercise, and relying on a supplement alone for

good health. The data indicate that, in fact, dietary supplement users make better food choices in addition to taking supplements. A report on the 2003-2006 National Health and Nutrition Examination Surveys (NHANES) calculated nutrient intakes of dietary supplement users as compared to non-users and found that people who used dietary supplements had somewhat higher intakes of most nutrients from food alone (not counting the nutrients in dietary supplements) than people who were not supplement users.

On the flip side, contrary to assertions that supplement users are eating better already and therefore don't need the supplements they take, the NHANES data shows many Americans failed to consume the Estimated Average Requirement (EAR) for many nutrients when only naturally-occurring nutrients in foods were considered. Enrichment and fortification of foods decreased the prevalence of intakes below the EAR, and the use of dietary supplements further decreased shortfalls. For example, for vitamin A and calcium, more than half of NHANES respondents fell short. Food fortification lowered the prevalence of shortfalls to 50 percent for these nutrients. Supplementation drove the prevalence of shortfalls down even further, but 33 percent of the respondents still fell short.

"It's important to give dietary supplement users credit for their efforts to improve their overall wellness profile with thoughtful choices," said Dr. MacKay, "The scientific evidence indicates that they tend to incorporate these products into their lifestyles as part of a broader focus on healthy living, with supplement use just one of a constellation of smart, healthy habits."

Provided by Council for Responsible Nutrition

APA citation: Scientific review points to supplement users engaging in a pattern of healthy habits (2014, February 6) retrieved 10 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-02-scientific-supplement-users-engaging-pattern.html>

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