

Whole Food Concentrates Vs. Isolated Supplements



by Dr. Bill Hemmer

Ever since John Dalton, Charles Darwin and Albert Einstein used scientific methods to break apart natural phenomena the debate has been hot-and-heavy about whether we should simply use what nature provides, or isolate specific parts of a natural product, to improve health. In my 30-some years of clinical experience I've found that there are certain circumstances where both can be used effectively. The specific factors that must be considered include severity of deficiency; supplement quality; the commitment level of the patient; and finally, your ability to communicate the difference between the two types of supplements.

Due to many factors there are more severe vitamin and mineral deficiencies today than decades ago, the chief ones being the standard American diet, metabolic syndrome, leaky gut syndrome, and increased toxic load. We're currently the 4th generation who are not eating the way our ancestors did for thousands of years before us; processed foods, high fructose corn syrup and sugar have changed the epigenetic environment so dramatically that people's health potential is continuously degenerating.

Probably the best example of a mineral deficiency is iodine: some researchers estimate that 80% percent of modern Americans lack iodine. Iodine deficiency isn't linked to thyroid problems alone but also plays a large role in heart health, metabolism and overall muscle function. I currently screen almost every new patient for iodine deficiency, and find it 90% of the times that I check. This is an instance when using an isolated supplement is appropriate. Iodine is a halogen and is stored within the thyroid gland; therefore, loading a significant amount of iodine supplements as a stand-alone treatment is often very helpful at the start of a treatment protocol. Once iodine levels begin to improve and symptoms are gone then switching to a whole food sea plant-based supplement to keep levels from dropping again is the best way to go.

A second common situation for using a stand-alone isolated supplement is a severe Vitamin D deficiency. Using Vitamin D3 in large doses at the beginning of a treatment plan is very often necessary to quickly get Vitamin D levels back into normal physiological range. Once normal levels have been achieved then whole foods supplementation, like cod liver

oil or fish oil, can be substituted to maintain stable levels.

Most other deficiencies have many compounding factors that are not served nearly as well by isolated supplementation. If, for example, your patient has a B-complex deficiency and you give them just B6 or folic acid, and they're also deficient in other parts of the B-complex, this will often lead to an initial decrease in symptoms followed by a drastic increase, due to an imbalance of the B-complex ratios.

This is one of the major arguments people have about supplements in the first place, i.e., they feel better short-term then worse in the long-term. This is also the argument used in medical literature about the efficacy of supplements: using large doses of any specific isolated natural compound will use up the reserves of the co-factors, phytonutrients and mineral activators necessary for that natural compound to be used in the body. Once those reserves are depleted, the opposite biological effect can be expected because the body is now put into a deficiency state again.

A primary factor to consider is supplement quality. This is when learning

how to read a supplement label becomes important, and this is also a very good lesson to teach your patients. When you look at a label for a vitamin or mineral supplement the first thing to notice is how each ingredient is described, e.g. if calcium is labeled as "calcium (as calcium carbonate)" that means the calcium is bound to a carbonate molecule.

Another common example is magnesium (as magnesium oxide). When these ingredients are thus shown on labels it means they are isolated minerals that have been taken out of their natural source(s) and bound to a binding agent that isn't normally found in nature.

The same explanation holds true for other vitamins. Commonly, Vitamin C is listed as ascorbic acid. Ascorbic acid is only part of the whole food Vitamin C complex but most people usually think of it as the complete Vitamin C. Many of the B-complex vitamins (e.g., thiamine, pyridoxine and biotin) are also listed this way, all of these being examples of the isolated parts of vitamins.

Many vitamin/mineral supplements also contain something called a "proprietary blend." These ingredients are usually the whole food component of the supplement and do not specifically contribute to the label claim; however, you can often tell how good a supplement is by looking at the ratio of individually listed vitamin/minerals to proprietary blend. If there is more proprietary blend than individually listed ingredients, then the more whole food the supplement contains.

When it comes to herbs, it's a whole different story. You must be very careful and really do your homework. Herbs have been used effectively for thousands of years, but only if taken from the right part of the plant, the right species, the right area of the world, and with the right amount of active ingredient. In other words, you need to either be very knowledgeable or enlist the help of a practitioner you trust.

When you look at an herbal label, you need to look for the name of the herb including the species. Unscrupulous manufacturers will attempt to sell an herb that has the same name but is the wrong species, e.g. there are many species of Echinacea but only 2 species have enough of the proper active ingredients to help your immune system.

Another factor that can be confusing is which part of the plant is used. Tribulus is a very potent plant that has been used for centuries to increase stamina, libido, and overall energy. Often you'll see tribulus listed as an herb in a supplement, but unless you know that only the leaves contain the active compound needed to produce the desired effect, you may be getting not only the leaves but also the stems, roots and other parts of the plant.

Also, an important aspect is how much of the actual herb is in the product. The label should include the amount of starting herb and also how much concentration occurs to achieve the finished product. So if you start with 10 grams of dried herb and you extract that down to 1 gram of concentration-extracted herb the ratio would be 10 to 1, and it would show on the label as 10:1. This is critical in determining exactly how many tablets equal the same amount of extracted herbal concentration when comparing different products. I've literally seen an entire bottle of one herb equal the amount of extracted herb concentrate in just 2 tablets of other products.

Finally, it is essential to note how much standardized active compound is in each tablet, so that you can be sure that what you think is in the tablet is actually there. If the active compound amounts are not listed, chances are there isn't much and the product will not have the desired therapeutic effect.

A compelling reason for understanding the difference between these



things is to be able to explain all of this to your patients, so they can make a better commitment to the outcome. If they know that you've done your homework and are confident that you're recommending only the highest quality products, then they are much more likely to follow through. Supplement value is determined by your patient. Value equals price times benefit, and if you're providing a huge benefit at a reasonable price the value skyrockets.

In summary, the pivotal consideration is your ability to remain on the patient's side at all times and communicate your reasoning for the supplementation you're recommending. If you are able to educate your patients as to why you are the right person to help them rebuild their health, and you teach them to understand that you are really working to help them become their own health-care provider, then everybody wins.

If you're recommending supplements to your patients, it is critical that you can tell the good ones from the bad ones. Initially, you may have to use isolated vitamins or minerals to rescue an individual from a severe condition; however, once you get them back on track, you should recommend a whole food concentrate to ensure that all of the co-factors, micronutrients and phytochemicals of nature are working to ameliorate your patients' health and longevity.

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