



November 7, 2009 – Grand Rapids, MI

Vitamin C

The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition just published a paper on vitamin C deficiency in the United States (1). Researchers compared dietary intake and supplement intake and serum levels of vitamin C on over 7,000 men, women, and children who were participants in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 2003-4. They found that over 7% of the population had a vitamin C deficiency based on their serum levels. That puts them at risk for scurvy, the disease that results from a deficiency of vitamin C. Muscle weakness, easy bruising, cuts that won't heal, and loose teeth are just some of the problems associated with scurvy.

But there were some surprises—at least to me. The group with the most significant vitamin C deficiency? Baby Boomer men topped the list at 11%. Probably not surprising when men consider Skittles a member of the fruit group. The group with lowest deficiency? Boys six to eleven. The percentage with deficiency stays very low until boys go away to college, and then it begins to increase; I guess we do need our mothers telling us to eat our vegetables and drink our orange juice.

One more thing. Those subjects who regularly took a vitamin C supplement had a deficiency that averaged 2% in both men and women. For those who didn't take a supplement, the deficiency rate averaged 13%. Food trumps supplements because we all need to eat better, but taking a vitamin C supplement is important no matter how good your diet may be.

Sub-Clinical Deficiency

I've talked about the hype associated with vitamin D and the concept of a sub-clinical deficiency. Simply put, it means that you may get enough D to prevent rickets but not enough to prevent other conditions like depression, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. While this study is important for looking at vitamin C deficiency, there is still the possibility that there are other sub-clinical deficiencies that exist but aren't as noticeable as scurvy. I'm assuming you would notice if your teeth were loose, but you might not attribute bleeding gums with not getting enough vitamin C. It may take years to find such connections. You can wait or you can take 250 to 500 mg vitamin C every day.

The Bottom Line

As time goes on, we may find that there are more sub-clinical deficiencies than scientists and healthcare professionals recognize. Don't blame them—if no one's looking at the possible relationships, they won't be found. You can simply start to supplement with vitamin C right now to prevent a vitamin C deficiency. But you also can find out where you stand on vitamin C and other vitamins and minerals by taking The Vitamin & Mineral Hand-Scored Assessment. It's easy to use, only 31 questions in a spreadsheet format. It's based on the best of science and can help you identify any nutritional deficiencies you may have, including vitamin C. I'm bringing back the special price on the two-pack so you and a friend or family member can try it for the introductory offer of \$2.89, and that includes shipping—of course, larger quantities are available if you have a lot of friends or a big family. The special will be available for only a limited time, so make sure you order yours today.

And you Baby Boomer men—follow a six-year old around and eat what he eats. They seem to have it all over us.

What are you prepared to do today?

Dr. Chet

Reference: Am J Clin Nutr 2009;90:1252–63.



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