

## **Ménage a Trois!**

Do we need mineral supplements in the first place? And why as athletes, would we need supplements of Calcium, Chromium or Zinc?

To first understand the difference between a vitamin and a mineral, one is virtually useless without the other. Vitamins cannot function or cannot be assimilated without the aid of minerals. And while the body can synthesize some vitamins, it cannot manufacture a single mineral. Although there are about eight known minerals, RDA (Recommended Daily Allowances) have been established for only six: Calcium, iodine, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, and zinc.

Vitamins are organic substances, and are essential to the normal functioning of our bodies: growth, vitality, and general well-being. If you ate the "right" foods in a well balanced diet you would get all the vitamins you need. But, the fact of the matter is, very few of us are able to arrange that mythical diet! Vitamin supplements serve the highly important function of energizing our metabolism, keeping our bodies tuned up and operating at a high performance level. We have always known that calcium (together with phosphorus) work together for healthy bones and teeth. But did you know that calcium (and magnesium) are important for good cardiovascular health? For the American woman, calcium represents the mineral most deficient in her diet, yet many women who suffer from menstrual cramps find relief by increasing their calcium intake. For teenagers, suffering from "growing pains", and for people afflicted with back aches, an increase in their consumption of calcium will usually relieve the symptoms.

Chromium is a mineral that helps bring protein to the parts of the body where it's needed, and works with insulin in the metabolism of sugar. Essentially, it plays an important role in energy production, and will aid growth and muscle development. However, when you exercise strenuously, your body loses chromium five times faster than normal. As you get older, you also retain less chromium in your body. Chromium is also known to prevent and lower high blood pressure, and work as a deterrent for diabetes.

Zinc, another mineral highly recommended for athletes, plays the important role of directing and overseeing the body's processes, maintenance of enzyme systems, and protein synthesis. The right amount of zinc will help an athlete recover from his or her workouts faster, because one of this mineral's primary functions governs the contractility of muscles, and helps in the formation of insulin. However, excessive sweating can cause a loss of as much as 3 mg. of zinc per day. Other benefits of zinc are: an accelerated healing time for internal and external wounds, increased mental alertness, a strengthening of the immune system, and a decrease in cholesterol deposits.

Remember, minerals are essential for proper vitamin supplement, preferably after a meal, always take minerals with them. Always consult the label or a doctor for the correct dosage of vitamins and minerals - balance and moderation are the keys to a successful diet.

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