The supplement industry is big business. Each year, Americans spend billions on supplements such as vitamins, minerals, and individual nutrients. You may have noticed the recent bombardment of supplement sales, now appearing in local gyms, nail salons, doctor’s offices, and more. Perhaps that’s why an estimated 40% of Americans take a supplement.

Vitamins and minerals are nutrients that you must get from your food because your body can’t make them. In a perfect world, we would get all of the nutrients we need from our diet. This is because foods, unlike supplements, contain phytochemicals, compounds that are linked to chronic disease prevention of cancer and heart disease. Food also contains dietary fiber, which as outlined in last months WITW provides a variety of health benefits.

However for most of us, our diets are far from perfect. Many people run short on key nutrients, which may increase their risk of heart disease (folic acid), weakened bones (vitamin D) or nerve damage (vitamin B-12). Be wary that a multivitamin will not make up for a fast-food diet. Beans, whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and lean protein contain essential items that we cannot get in enough quantity from a 1-a-day pill.

A supplement should be for added nutrition protection, not a substitute for a healthy diet.

In 1994, the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act was signed, allowing the firm that produces the vitamin to be responsible to assure its safe. Unless a supplement contains a new ingredient, the FDA is not involved in the supplements regulation. Unfortunately that means there is no central governing body to oversee the safety and amount of vitamins or minerals. We can only assume that what is inside the product is the same as what is listed on the “Supplement Facts” panel.

According to the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), the following should be found in an ideal supplement:

- 100% of the Daily Value (DV) for Vitamin A, B-1 (thiamin), B-2 (riboflavin), B-6, B-12, C, D, E, folic acid, and niacin
- 100% of the Daily Value for zinc, copper, and chromium as there is evidence that Americans don’t get enough of these minerals in the current diet
- A separate supplement might be needed to get enough calcium and selenium as most once-daily pills don’t contain enough of either mineral. In a recent study, selenium appeared to reduce the risk of lung, colon, and prostate cancer.
- Better safe than sorry: The CSPI also recommended that supplements contain no more than 500mg of phosphorus, 200 mg vitamin B-6, and 15,000 IU of beta carotene.

**Vitamin D: Is your diet enough?**

Some experts think that the current recommendations for Vitamin D intake should be higher. Bess Dawson Hughes, former president of the National Osteoporosis Foundation recommends 800 to 1,000 IU’s a Vitamin D daily. That’s the level that lowers the risk of breaking a hip or other bone. Recent studies also show enlarged fast-twitch muscle fibers in people who have a high intake of vitamin D. That translates into stronger muscles and improving muscle performance. Extensive Vitamin D research is currently being done to examine it’s relationship with cancer and diabetes. From early research, there seems to be a positive correlation between vitamin D intake and lowered risk of breast/prostate cancer.
Couscous Salad with Lemon Dressing

**Ingredients**
- 1 can chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 3/4 cups uncooked couscous
- 1 tomato, chopped
- 3 scallions, sliced
- 1 can garbanzo beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 medium peppers, chopped
- 1 medium, grated
- 1/2 cup raisins or currents
- 1/4 cup chopped dried apricots
- 1/4 cup minced parsley

**Dressing**
- 1/2 cup lemon juice
- 1 1/2 tbsp. olive oil
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/4 tsp. turmeric
- 1/4 curry powder
- 1/4 tsp. Tabasco sauce

1. **Bring chicken broth, 1/2 cup water, and 1/2 tsp. salt to a boil and slowly stir in couscous. Mix together, cover and remove from heat. Let the couscous stand until liquid is absorbed (15 minutes) then fluff with a fork and transfer to a large bowl. Let cool.**

2. **Mix in tomato, pepper, carrots, raisins, apricots, parsley.**

3. **In a separate bowl mix together dressing ingredients. Add to couscous salad and toss well. Chill before serving, at least 1 hour.**

**Alternatives for Easter Candy**

Easter baskets need not be full of candy, to be enjoyable. With growing rates of childhood obesity, it is important to teach kids that holiday celebrations don’t need to be associated with sugary treats and unhealthy habits.

Below are ideas for filling Easter baskets with surprises that aren’t full of sugar, fat, and artificial colors

- Books or DVDs
- Art supplies, craft kits, coloring books
- Educational computer games
- Fruit or non-candy items
- Puzzles, stuffed animals or small toys

**March is National Nutrition Month**

March means National Nutrition Month, a campaign designed to promote nutrition awareness and healthful eating. National Nutrition Month also promotes the Registered Dietitian to the community as the most credible source of evidence based food and nutrition information.

This year’s National Nutrition Month theme focuses on nutrition “From the Ground Up,” back-to-basics eating with simple, economical food and preparation techniques.

“From the Ground Up” also promotes local produce as a sustainable and inexpensive way to increase nutrients in your diet.

Now is the perfect time to decide if your family would like to participate in a CSA, a community supported agriculture group in which you receive a weekly share of produce from a local farm.

Check out Fresh Edibles Community Farms (French Camp), and Lucero Organic Farms (Lodi)

For more information on local farms, famers markets and to compare CSA’s:

http://www.localharvest.org/