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Vitamins: tested and rated

- Reporter: Helen Wellings
- Broadcast Date: August 07, 2007

From A to zinc, a staggering 70 per cent of Australians buy nutritional supplements, spending on average \$200 per year: a total of \$2.3 billion.

But it is hard to know which to choose, from a mind-blowing 30,000 different types on the market. An extraordinary scientific analysis by a team of Canadian and US biochemists may come to the rescue.

They have thoroughly examined more than 100 leading multivitamins available in Australia and New Zealand, evaluating and comparing their formulations by separating and measuring each ingredient: vitamins, minerals antioxidants and other components.

Dr Lesley Braun, Pharmacist and Naturopath from the National Herbalists Association of Australia and Dr Marc Cohen, Professor of Complementary Medicine at RMIT are the authors of *Herbs and Natural Supplements*.

We showed them the latest comparison of multivitamin products which scores brand by brand.

"What you've got is seven experts from the US that have put together what I would call a wish list, a list of ingredients they believe would be the ultimate to have in a multivitamin," Dr Braun said.

Professor Cohen added: "It was done on a range of issues, which include how absorbable the vitamins were, the range of vitamins and minerals that were in the tablet and whether they were in the appropriate amounts and in the appropriate form" says Professor Marc Cohen.

Dr Braun explained the research further.

"Their aim is to try to find a product on the market that is as close as possible to their wish list of the most comprehensive, of the highest doses, for them what they would consider the best," Dr Braun said.

"It is very important when you look at a vitamin supplement that not only have you got the key ingredients, but you've got them in the right combinations."

They say the absolutely perfect multivitamin tablet would be a huge "poly-pill", the size of a walnut, but Professor Cohen says we should be aiming for the following.

"The full range of vitamins e.g. A, the full range of vitamin Bs - and B should be done in a complex, not just 1 or 2 of the vitamins - certainly vitamin C and a range of minerals," Prof Cohen said.

"There is also an argument to say you should not put everything in the one pill because things absorb differently, e.g. the fat soluble vitamins."

Now the results

First, the final top 5 scorers. Remember they're rated against an ideal multi-vitamin pill.

Best: USANA Health Sciences Essentials scores a very high 74 per cent, followed by Solgar Omnium at 56.5 per cent.

Thorn Research AI's Formula scored 47 percent, Clinicians Vitamin and Mineral Boost 45 per cent, and NFS Nutraceuticals Ultimate Sports Multi 44.5 per cent.

But you won't find them at the supermarket nor pharmacies: they're available online, some through naturopaths and herbalists.

What is it that gave these brands such top ratings?

"They do contain a lot of the B group vitamins, the antioxidants that are traditional vitamins, so bioflavonoids. And they contain a few other little bits and pieces as well in high doses, such as the minerals with magnesium and calcium," Dr Braun said.

"A lot of the key ingredients are in very high doses. So when you match it up to the wish list that the US experts put together, it looks very good."

Most of the multivitamins tested scored lower than 20 per cent. Again though, all were rated against the ideal.

About one-third only managed single figure scores. Bottom of the list, unbelievably, some of our top supermarket and pharmacy brands: Myadec and Nature's Own Multivitamins and Minerals both with just 2.4 per cent,

Herron Clinical Nutrition All-in-One Multi-Vitamin and Mineral scored 2 per cent, Guardian Multi Vitamins and Minerals Hi Potency also 2 per cent, and last was Advocare Macro-Mineral Complex at just 1 per cent.

But at a fraction of the price of the top scorers, our expert nutritionists say you do get what you pay for.

"They tend to have fewer number of ingredients compared to the ones that rated very highly," Dr Braun said.

"Also the strength of the ingredients tended to be lower.

"So I see them as just a very basic stopgap for someone whose diet really needs some work, whereas as they go higher in the list, they become more sophisticated and have better combinations."

Professor Cohen said: "I think the ones in the supermarkets and pharmacies are competing on price. You could have the vitamin on the label and only a very tiny amount. It won't actually do anything for you, but it is still on the label and consumers don't really know how much is the correct amount."

So are the right vitamins worth the money?

"Go with the ones that are comprehensive in good doses, the ones on the list," Dr Braun said. "Ideally though, go to a health professional, get your diet looked at, start working on the diet and get the right supplement for you."

"There is strong evidence now that everyone over the age of 55 should be taking a multivitamin every day to prevent long-term diseases," Prof Cohen said.

"I'd extend that to say everyone should be taking a multivitamin because the risks are very low and the benefits are potentially very high."

So what does an expert take daily? Here's a tip: don't waste your money taking multivitamins with a cup of tea.

"The best way to take them is in the morning with breakfast, big glass of water," Prof Braun said. "Tea not so good because it binds some of the iron and you won't get the absorption, cancels out the iron."

Dr Lesley Braun takes:

- "Dona Glucosamine" by Your Health.
- "CoQ10", Co-enzyme Q10 by BioCeuticals for healthy cardio-vascular function and good for people taking statins for lowering cholesterol. Lesley also takes them for migraine.
- "Multi-biocomplex" with selenium, a multivitamin by Nutrimedice.
- A bowl of blueberries which are neuro regenerative - to combat the loss of brain-cells due to ageing. If she can't buy fresh in season, she buys frozen blueberries.

National Herbalists Association of Australia.

Website: www.nhaa.org.au

Dr Lesley Braun and Professor Marc Cohen wrote "Herbs and Natural Supplements: An Evidence Based Guide. Published by Elsevier, November 2004. ISBN 0729536823. Contains 567 pages. Price \$A40.

TEST RESULTS

The scores and brand analysis of multi-vitamins, as mentioned in our story, are in *Comparative Guide to Nutritional Supplements. A Compendium of over 100 Products available in Australia and New Zealand*, written by Lyle MacWilliam BSc, MSc, FP. (Northern Dimensions Publishing, Vernon, British Columbia, Canada. Revised 1st Edition).

But it is not in bookshops in Australia. Go to www.uniprotools.com.au. You can order the book from that site by selecting Lyle MacWilliam's name on the left-hand side of the page. Price is \$40 including postage and handling.

Nutritional Supplements sorted by score

USANA Health Sciences Essentials 73.7
Solgar Omnium 56.5
Thorne Research AI's Formula 46.9
Clinicians Vitamin and Mineral Boost 45.1
NFS Nutraceuticals Ultimate Sports Multi 44.5
Thorne Research Basic Nutrients V 44.4
Thorne Research Basic Nutrients III 38.7
Solgar VM-2000 37.9
Pharmanex Lifepak 28.1
Amway NutriWay Double X 27.3
GNC LiveWell Women's Ultra Mega 26.1
Pharmanex Lifepak Women 25.6
BioCeuticals Multi Essentials 25.3
Pharmalliance OxiChel 24.8
Neways Orachel 24.1
Solgar Formula VM-75 23.1
Radiance Multi-Power 22.6
Nutra Life Active Men's Multi 22.3
GNC LiveWell Mega Men 21.2
Pharmanex Lifepak Prime 21.0
Nature's Sunshine Supplemental Vitamins & Minerals 20.6
Thompson's Multifort 17.5
Nature's Way Mega Multi 17.1
Thompson's Immunofort 16.9
Nutra Life Active Women's Multi Plus 16.4
Eagle Tresos B PluSe 16.4
Nature's Way Women's Energy Mega Multivitamin 16.4
Pharm-a-Care Women's Mega Strength Multi-Vitamins 16.4
Bioglan Women's Complete Multi Compex 16.4
Pretorius Women's Live Better Multi Vitamin & Mineral 16.3
Kordel's Men's Multi (without Iron) 15.4
Nutrition Care Formula SF88 15.1
Blackmores Women's Vitality Multi 14.1
Metagenics Multigenics 14.1
Red Seal Women's Multi 14
Nature's Own Daily Multi Peak Performance 14
Mannatech GlycoLEAN Catalyst 13.9
Natural Nutrition Mega Potency Women's Multi Vitamin with Selenium 13.7
Nature's Sunshine Mega-Chel 13.5
Metagenics Multigenics Phyto Plus 13.5
Blackmores Women's Multi & Evening Primrose Oil 13.4
Natural Nutrition Mega Potency Fifty Plus Multi Vitamins 13.4
Blackmores Sustained Release Women's Multi Vitamins & Minerals 13.3
Natural Nutrition Mega Potency Men's Multi Vitamin with Selenium 13.3
Red Seal Men's Multi 13.3
Pharm-a-Care Men's Mega Strength Multi-Vitamin 11.7
Bioglan Men's Complete Multi Complex 11.6
Nature's Way Men's Energy Mega Multi-Vitamin Iron-Free 11.6
Blackmores Sustained Release Multi Vitamins and Minerals 11.5
Swisse Women's Ultivite Formula 1 11.5

Pluravit Time-Release Multi 11.5
Thompson's Men's Multi with Antioxidants 11.3
Herbs of Gold Executive Multi Vitamin & Mineral 11.1
Golden Glow Senior's One-A-Day Multi 11.1
Swisse Women's Ultivite No Iron or Iodine 10.9
Swisse Men's Ultivite Formula 1 10.8
Blackmores Sustained Release Multi Vitamins & Minerals + Selenium 10.7
Melaleuca Vitality for Women 10.6
Reliv Now 10.4
Nature's Own Multivitamin Plus Omega 3 Fish Oil 9.1
Avon VitAdvance Women's Complete II 9.1
Good Health Men's Multi-Plus 9.1
Pharma Foods Pharma Day with Selenium 8.7
Herbalife Formula 3 8.7
Kordel's Women's Multi Plus EPO 8.6
Cenovis Mega Multi 8.4
Thompson's Femmefort 8.3
Microgenics Mega Multivitamin 8
Melaleuca Vitality for Men 7.5
Reliv Classic 7.5
Nutrition Care Formula 33SE 7.4
Microgenics Women's Pro Active Multi Vitamin 6.8
Golden Glow Super One-A-Day 6.7
Herron Clinical Nutrition Men's Multi-Vitamin & Minerals 6.2
Blackmores Men's Performance Multi 6.2
Good Health Women's Multi-Plus 6
Vitaplex Professional One a Day Multivitamin 5
New Vision Essential Vitamins 4.7
Centrum Select 50+ 4.3
Amway NutriWay Daily 4.2
Microgenics Men's Essential Multivitamin 4.1
Myadec Gold A-Z Guard 4
Red Seal Total Multi with Minerals 3.9
Centrum Complete from A to Zinc 3.9
Cenovis 50+ Multi 3.8
Guardian Women's Multi Vitamins & Minerals 3.6
Herron Clinical Nutrition One-a-Day Women's Multi-Vitamins & Minerals 3.6
Cenovis Multivitamin and Minerals 3.4
Amcal One-A-Day 3.3
Berocca Performance 3.2
Healtheries Women's Multi (AU) 3.2
Cenovis Women's Multi 3.1
Nature's Own Daily Multi Essentials 3.1
Pluravit Women 3.1
Golden Glow Women's One-a-Day Multi 3.1
Blackmores Multi + Gingko for 55+ 3
Pluravit 50 Plus 3
Healtheries Women's Multi (NZ) 2.7
Hivita LiquiVita 2.6
Red Seal One-a-Day Multi & Minerals 2.6
Amcal Multivitamin & Mineral Effervescent 2.6
Golden Glow Men's One-a-Day Multi 2.5
Bioglan Daily Plus Max 2.5
Cenovis Men's Multi 2.5

Myadec Multivitamins and Minerals 2.4
Nature's Own Multivitamin & Mineral 2.4
Herron Clinical Nutrition All-in-One Multi-Vitamin & Mineral 2.1
Guardian Multi Vitamins & Minerals Hi Potency 2.1
Advocare Macro-Mineral Complex 1.1

Source: *Comparative Guide to Nutritional Supplements* by Lyle MacWilliam, BSc, MSc, FP (Northern Dimensions Publishing, ISBN 0-9732538-3-5



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