

# Be a ray of sunshine with these two top ingredients

**SHINING EXAMPLE:** Gwyneth Paltrow was told to spend more time in the sun



**ALISON COLEMAN** finds diet and lifestyle are the crucial routes to a healthy outlook

**V**ITAMIN supplements offer a quick and easy way of getting all the nutrients our bodies need to maintain good health. In theory, a good diet should suffice but there are times when supplements can help to prevent health problems.

When actress Gwyneth Paltrow discovered that she was suffering from bone loss, or osteoporosis, which can lead to osteoporosis, and also low levels of vitamin D, she went on a prescription strength level of vitamin D. She was also told to spend time in the sun, sunlight being one of the best natural sources of vitamin D, needed to build healthy bone tissue.

For most, people who are in good health, eating a healthy well-balanced diet should eliminate the need for vitamin supplements.

Nutritionist Mark Gilbert, who specialises in diet and supplement advice for people looking to lose fat, gain muscle and improve their general

health, said: "If people consumed a variety of green and bright coloured fruits and vegetables, along with lean chicken, meat and dairy, they more than likely would be getting their recommended daily allowance (RDA) of vitamins and minerals. The problem is that people simply don't eat this way."

Vitamin supplements may seem the easiest way of compensating for dietary shortfalls but they don't provide the benefits of a healthy diet.

He added: "Fruits and vegetables, along with things like tea, coffee and dark chocolate, contain certain phytochemicals, or plant chemicals, that are more powerful antioxidants - chemicals that help to eliminate free radicals that damage healthy, living cells - than vitamin C or E. So you can't fill the gap by just adding vitamins to a poor diet."

There are two main vitamin groups: fat soluble vitamins A, D, E and K, found in foods such as animal fats and vegetable oils, dairy products and oily fish and water soluble vitamins B and C, found mainly in fresh fruit and

vegetables. The most common vitamin deficiency is vitamin D, due in part to high-profile health campaigns warning people about the dangers of over-exposure to the sun and the current fad for low-fat diets.

Helen Bond, a state-registered dietician and spokesperson for the British Dietetic Association, said: "Vitamin D is produced by the body in response to sunlight, so people who have less exposure,

including some Asian ladies who cover their bodies, the elderly and housebound, are most likely to be deficient in vitamin D."

"People over the age of 65 are often advised to take a daily vitamin D supplement." Vitamin B12 is found mainly in animal-based foods, such as meat, eggs, fish and dairy produce and is needed for the production of red blood cells. Strict vegetarians and vegans who don't eat any meat or dairy may not get enough vitamin B12 and without supplements could be more at risk of becoming anaemic.

With the onset of winter and the cold and flu season many people start taking extra vitamin C in the belief that it can stave off infection.

Ms Bond added: "If you are in very good health, a higher dosage of vitamin C may shorten the duration of the cold symptoms slightly but it won't prevent you from catching a cold, nor will it make a significant impact on its severity."

While vitamin deficiencies can lead to serious health problems, taking too many vitamin supplements to compensate for what may be missing from your diet can lead to side-effects.

While a well-formulated multivitamin supplement is unlikely to cause any real issues, taken individually in excess, vitamin A can affect the bones and make them more brittle, vitamin C taken over time can cause mild stomach upset and even kidney stones and vitamin B6 may cause tingling and numbness. Mr Gilbert said: "Ideally, everyone should be



**SUNSHINE BOOSTER:** Take things in hand and seek the rays, say experts

eating a balanced diet and depending upon their own or their family's medical history, just take the vitamin supplements that are relevant to their individual risk factors."

Ms Bond insists that when it comes to healthy eating, people need to see the bigger picture. She said: "There is no point paying for expensive vitamin and mineral supplements and eating a poor diet or relying on convenience food. People are still not making the link between diet and lifestyle-related diseases like diabetes and heart disease."

"A lot of the foods we buy, such as cereals and spreads, are already fortified with extra vitamins so most of us should be able to enjoy a healthy diet without relying on vitamin supplements."

• The Food Standards Agency website has a list of essential vitamins and minerals, RDAs and food sources. Visit [www.food.gov.uk/healthydiet](http://www.food.gov.uk/healthydiet) For more information see the British Dietetic Association ([www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)) and British Nutrition Foundation ([www.nutrition.org.uk](http://www.nutrition.org.uk)).

## 'People still don't make the link between diet and disease'

## Vitamin B offers new hope for the elderly

SCIENTISTS at Oxford University have shown vitamin B can halve the rate of brain shrinkage in elderly people with mild memory problems, which may have positive implications for those who go on to develop Alzheimer's disease. Around one in six people

over 70 is thought to suffer mild cognitive impairment, experiencing problems with memory and other mental functions. Around half develop dementia, usually within five years of diagnosis. Since the rate of brain shrinkage is more rapid

in those with mild cognitive impairment who go on to develop Alzheimer's, it is possible the vitamin treatment could slow down the development of the disease.

However, scientists say more research still needs to be done.

