Do you really need to take multivitamins?

PLEASE NOTE: This transcription was created using an AI transcription tool and may not be a 100% accurate representation of the recorded audio.

[00:00:09] **James Rowe:** What are multivitamins and do you really need to take them well? With insights and analysis from two industry experts, we'll answer those questions and many more on this podcast from which, hello, I'm James Rowe, and welcome to this a brand new series of our health and wellbeing podcast, where we give you expert advice and recommendations to help you live your best life every day.

[00:00:32] **James Rowe:** Now this series is exclusively focused on vitamins and supplements, and today we're focusing on. Multivitamins so. Let's introduce our guests for today and for the full series. I'm pleased to say first of all, public health nutritionist here at which afar. Lath, how are you?

[00:00:48] **Shefalee Loth:** I'm good, thank you.

[00:00:49] **James Rowe:** Thanks for coming back and coming back as well.

[00:00:52] **James Rowe:** Uh, you will join us on one episode of the first series, Sophie Madeleine, founder of City Dieticians. How are you?

[00:00:57] **Sophie Medlin:** I'm very well. Thanks for having me.

[00:00:59] **James Rowe:** I think this series is gonna be quite interesting because I feel like sort of over the last few months and the last couple of years, vitamin and supplements have.

[00:01:06] **James Rowe:** Really boomed, haven't they? And there's a lot of sort of misinformation out there as well. Do you kind of agree with that as well?

[00:01:14] **Sophie Medlin:** Yeah, I think it's really hard for people to sort through fact and fiction when it comes to supplements. The marketing is very clever. People are very good at selling you things that actually there's no real research around.

[00:01:25] **Sophie Medlin:** And I think it's become, you know, I work in the supplements industry as well, and it really is the wild West in terms of who can formulate what they can put in them. Anything goes. And it's a, we need a revolution in the supplements industry really to try and make things more, more robust and safer for people.

[00:01:41] **James Rowe:** And Ali, I feel like social media has really just driven this, hasn't it? It it's skyrocketed. And is you almost don't know who to trust anymore, do you? Well,

[00:01:49] **Shefalee Loth:** that's exactly it. Anybody can set up an account on social media and promote products without any kind of scientific nutritional background. Um, and as Sophie says.

[00:02:01] **Shefalee Loth:** There's just a range of products out there on the market that aren't backed by science, but are making really, really big claims. Well,

[00:02:10] **James Rowe:** thankfully, we've got you two here to put the, put the story right and we'll, we'll, we'll keep us on the right track. We're gonna focus on multivitamins today. Can we start with the, with the very basic question of what are multivitamins?

[00:02:24] **James Rowe:** What are they? What do they do?

[00:02:26] **Shefalee Loth:** Right. So I guess a multivitamin is any supplement that contains a range of nutrients. So when we looked at multivitamins for our research project, you could get a multivitamin that contain just the full range of vitamins. But then also there are things like A to Z multivitamins, and those contain a range of vitamins, but also.

[00:02:45] **Shefalee Loth:** Minerals. So for example, you'd have your vitamins A, C, D, and E, and your B vitamins in that product, but also a range of really important, um, minerals such as iron, calcium, magnesium, and more.

[00:03:01] **James Rowe:** And what we should try and stress here is, I guess what they're actually for, because I guess with all supplements, they're not a replacement for anything, are they?

[00:03:11] **Sophie Medlin:** No, and it's really important to say that any vitamin supplement isn't a replacement for diet. We need to, it should be like the icing on the cake of a diet as opposed to the cake itself. So when we think about multivitamins, I guess they're really targeted for everybody, which makes it quite difficult to judge what's good and what's not so good, because some people need more iron or more magnesium or more calcium than other people.

[00:03:32] **Sophie Medlin:** But I think really if we think about an a z multivitamin specifically, we're talking about something that's there to pick up. Dietary shortfalls. So if you're somebody who bounces from breakfast to lunch and you're picking things up on the go and you're not guaranteeing that you're getting all your leafy greens and all the extra bits and pieces that you know you need, it is a useful safety net if you like to help to pick up any shortfalls in your diet.

[00:03:53] **James Rowe:** And it shouldn't be considered a negative thing that you have to or choose to take. Uh, something like this, you know, as you say, if you're somebody who's busy and you really struggle to. Cook the right meals, it might just give you that little extra boost of something you might need.

[00:04:07] **Sophie Medlin:** Totally. I think that, you know, I work with patients all every day, every week, and everybody, regardless of their socioeconomic status, regardless of their education level, everybody struggles to be super reliable with what they're eating every single day.

[00:04:20] **Sophie Medlin:** And I think it's just, as you say, a safety net is something that people can pick up when they need it, but it's not something that anyone should feel. Worried about or ashamed of or feel like they're doing something wrong because they take one. I take a multivitamin. Do you take a multivitamin? I don't.

[00:04:32] **Sophie Medlin:** Sh doesn't.

[00:04:34] **James Rowe:** Nobody after about, uh, so I guess they are good for you, but can there be times when they might not be good for you as well?

[00:04:43] **Shefalee Loth:** Yeah, I guess the main thing is, as Sophie said, they can't replace a healthy, balanced, varied diet. So, you know, you can't eat terribly, but then expect. To be healthy because you take a multivitamin at the end of the day.

[00:04:58] **Shefalee Loth:** There aren't really any other examples, especially with multivitamins that are pretty general. The doses are at, you know, average levels, so there's no real risk of taking too much of something. I suppose the exceptions are if you are pregnant or trying to conceive, then actually you should be taking a targeted.

[00:05:18] **Shefalee Loth:** Pregnancy supplement, and not a general multivitamin, but actually the products we looked at in our analysis were suitable for children over 12 and adults.

[00:05:27] **James Rowe:** And we'll be getting into some of that research a little bit later on. That'll be for our members, and we'll be talking about what you did, how you looked into them, and revealing our best buys as well, which is always very exciting.

[00:05:37] **James Rowe:** But should we talk about who. Should be taking a multivitamin. Crucially, something you just touched on, uh, some people who might not be suitable for multivitamins. So should we first of all talk about people who we would maybe advise should at least consider taking a multivitamin?

[00:05:54] **Shefalee Loth:** Yeah, so I think I.

[00:05:55] **Shefalee Loth:** Anybody who has an erratic eating pattern or maybe excludes certain food groups from their diet because of allergies or also preferences. So for example, if you don't eat red meat, then actually you might find it quite hard to get. Enough iron in your diet, so you might want to consider an iron supplement or even a multivitamin.

[00:06:17] **Shefalee Loth:** Similarly, if you have a dairy allergy and find it hard to have plant, you know, fortified plant alternatives, then you may be a bit low on calcium. So you might want to think about taking a supplement as well. So there are lots of reasons, and as Sophie said, actually. If you are not sure about your diet is meeting all your nutritional needs, then you can have it as a bit of a safety net as well.

[00:06:41] **James Rowe:** And then on the flip side of the coin, people who shouldn't be taking multivitamins, because there's a few groups of people where you should almost come to this with a bit more caution than than other people, right?

[00:06:52] **Sophie Medlin:** Yeah. So Ali's mentioned about. People who are pregnant. So we need to be careful with people who are pregnant because some, some types of multivitamin supplements contain a form of vitamin A, which is not suitable for pregnancy, but also with pregnancy.

[00:07:04] **Sophie Medlin:** You want to be really thinking about folic acid or folate, and that's not always in the correct dose or the right dose. If you are somebody who's trying to get pregnant in a multivitamin, so you want to use a pregnancy specific product, always when I'm working with patients who I'm recommending in general, I would always say if you're taking any prescription medications of any kind, or you are, you have a diagnosed medical condition.

[00:07:26] **Sophie Medlin:** Always check with a dietician, a doctor, or a pharmacist before you start any multivitamin product or any vitamin product for that matter. Just because there are certain things that you shouldn't take too much of. Things that can affect absorption of that medication in some multivitamin products. So you just wanna have, for our safety and for everyone's safety, have a blanket sort of recommendation around that.

[00:07:44] **Sophie Medlin:** This

[00:07:45] **James Rowe:** is where it almost feels like it. Really confusing though, isn't it? Would you agree that this kind of world is a bit confusing to sort of the, the general public? You're both nodding at me because I feel like you've seen this before, right? Yeah,

[00:07:57] **Shefalee Loth:** and it's confusing for us as well, you know, um, as Sophie said, we've worked for a long time in the nutrition and dietetics field, but actually there are so many products out there.

[00:08:09] **Shefalee Loth:** The science to back up all the ingredients isn't necessarily there. So it is confusing for us, let alone the general public

[00:08:16] **James Rowe:** do to ever find yourself sort of in the supermarket or in a pharmacy and look at the shelves and you see all these tubs or whatever of vitamins and supplements and think, oh my goodness, there's so much here.

[00:08:27] **James Rowe:** And are almost a bit worried about what people are picking up because they think they might just need it.

[00:08:31] **Sophie Medlin:** Absolutely. And I worry specifically about people going into some of the big pharmacies. Going into some of the sort of health food stores on the High Street and, and saying, oh, I, I'm struggling with menopausal symptoms, or I'm struggling with this, and being sold a basket full of things with no evidence behind them with all those extra fillers and bulking agents and things like that, that people don't really need.

[00:08:49] **Sophie Medlin:** And that, that concerns me. And I will say in my clinics. Every week somebody tells me about a supplement they're taking that I've never heard of. Really? Absolutely. And I work in the supplements industry. I've been a dietician for 20 years. There is so much new stuff on the market. There's so many wild things going on in the space that there is always something that someone says, oh, I'm taking this.

[00:09:10] **Sophie Medlin:** Funny thing. What do you think about that? And I think, well, I need to do a bit of research about that before I advise you on it. And usually it's something that's fairly inert, something that's not really gonna do them any harm, but doesn't have any evidence. And sometimes it's something that I think, you know, really with your medical conditions, that's not something you should be taking.

[00:09:26] **Sophie Medlin:** It's not safe.

[00:09:26] **Shefalee Loth:** Yeah. And the other thing is if you are taking a cocktail of supplements, you know there's a real risk there that you could be overdosing or taking too much of certain nutrients, especially if you find a certain vitamin or mineral is in several of the supplements that you are taking collectively and cumulatively, you could be taking too much.

[00:09:46] **Shefalee Loth:** Yeah, and there are risks there as well.

[00:09:48] **James Rowe:** So let's say for example, you know, you're taking five or six or seven multivitamins and they've all got. I'm just gonna pick vitamin D for example. Yeah. They've all got vitamin D in. You could then be overdosing on vitamin D. Is that, is that what you're trying to say?

[00:10:00] **James Rowe:** Exactly, yeah.

[00:10:00] **Sophie Medlin:** Easily. And vitamin D is one of those common things that everyone puts in everything. And so then you end up with, um, you know, vitamin D from this, that, the other, the all your supplements, and then maybe from some fortified food that you're having or from your protein shake or from something else that you've not even considered.

[00:10:13] **James Rowe:** Gosh, it is a confusing world, isn't it? Mm. It's we were talking about consulting with the right people. Before you take any multivitamins, can we just try and reiterate who you should be speaking to? You know, would your GP be able to advise on that? Would you speak to a dietician? Who would you be looking for?

[00:10:28] **Sophie Medlin:** Yeah, great question. Look, I think. Specifically for people who are taking prescription medications, you want to speak to your GP primarily, um, or a pharmacist. They should be able to answer those questions. If you're someone who's looking for a general advice on whether you might need a multivitamin, then go and see a dietician, and there's loads of us in private practice.

[00:10:44] **Sophie Medlin:** But you can also get referred by your gp.

[00:10:46] **James Rowe:** And what about men versus women? I think feel like we often hear about certain supplements. Uh, if you are a man, you might want to take 'em. If you're women, you might not, and vice versa for multivitamins, what would you have to say to that?

[00:10:58] **Sophie Medlin:** Uh, you know, our, our nutritional requirements in terms of these sorts of things between men and women, the differences is pretty small.

[00:11:04] **Sophie Medlin:** So actually for a multivitamin product, I wouldn't worry whether someone was a man or a woman taking it. Men need slightly more of some things than women do, and women may want more of iron, for example, because of the menstrual cycle. But ultimately, if it's just your safety net, we don't need to worry too much about the difference between men and women in this space.

[00:11:20] **James Rowe:** And we are gonna get into all of our reviews in just a moment, but for some general advice for people going out there into that supermarket and they see everything on the shelves, what kind of things can they look for? What can they sort of pick out where it might give them a bit, a bit of a sign that this is something is good and something isn't necessarily sort of hitting the the right standards.

[00:11:43] **Shefalee Loth:** So I guess if I were going into a supermarket or a chemist to look for a multivitamin supplement, I would look at the label on the back basically to see what nutrients it actually contains. Because actually when in our analysis, we found some supplements that were really good on paper, but actually when we delved a bit deeper, they were missing key ingredients.

[00:12:04] **Shefalee Loth:** And so that. In our analysis ruled them out of being a Best Buy, for example. Mm-hmm. So, you know, I would expect to see calcium and iron in a multivitamin and some of them didn't contain those ingredients or nutrients. I'd also look at where it's, gives you the percentage of your NRV and the NRV is your nutrient reference intake.

[00:12:25] **Shefalee Loth:** So basically that's the amount that an adult or a child over 12 needs to take every day, and it's the amount that will basically, for most healthy adults. Prevent deficiency. Mm-hmm. So if something's containing only 10% of your NRV, then it's not a great product 'cause it's not giving you enough. Now, if it's containing 80, 90%, a hundred percent, that's really what you should be looking for.

[00:12:50] **Shefalee Loth:** You know, you are gonna be getting some of those nutrients from the food that you eat. But actually you want, if you are paying for a supplement, you want it to contain what you need.

[00:13:00] **James Rowe:** That's really interesting actually, because I thought when you saying, oh, it's gonna get up to 80, 90, a hundred percent, that might even be a bit too much if you're getting it from sort of other sources like you know, your diet or that sort of thing.

[00:13:10] **James Rowe:** But that's not necessarily the case.

[00:13:12] **Shefalee Loth:** No, not really. I think, you know, when you are getting to those upper level limits, they are a lot higher than your NRV, so you don't really need to worry about that. Um, but you don't want a supplement. On the other side that contains a thousand percent of your NRV, you know, that is concerning.

[00:13:29] **Shefalee Loth:** So really it's about looking at what ingredients it has, what nutrients it has, but then also how much of your daily needs it provides. And are

[00:13:37] **James Rowe:** there some of those on the market where they contain well over a hundred percent? Have you seen that before? Oh, absolutely. Really? Yeah.

[00:13:42] **Sophie Medlin:** Lots of them. Yeah. And for some nutrients, you really don't need to worry about that.

[00:13:45] **Sophie Medlin:** So B vitamins, for example, you excrete them really easily and actually having a higher dose of B vitamins might make you feel a bit better and resolve things easier. On the other hand, there are other nutrients that you really don't want to have, you know, even 200% off really. And I think that that expecting the general public to, to be able to differentiate between water soluble and fat soluble vitamins and which are safe and which are not, is, is beyond the scope of what we can expect of people.

[00:14:08] **Sophie Medlin:** So really it's about having a basic understanding before you go shopping about what you might need for your diet, even if that's, you know, using AI to say, what sort of things might I need to look for? And then you can go and say, okay, I definitely need something that has calcium, or I definitely need something that has iron.

[00:14:21] **Sophie Medlin:** And that might just help to guide. You a little bit with that.

[00:14:24] **James Rowe:** Well, I think this is a very good time for us to reveal some of the very best multivitamins on the market, including our coveted witch Best Buys. Now, this is exclusively available to our witch members, so if you are a member already, there is a link in the show notes for you to click and you can head straight there.

[00:14:41] **James Rowe:** If you're not a member already, you can get 50% off your first year of a membership. Going to witch uk slash podcast offer, but for now, shale, Sophie, thanks very much.

[00:14:51] **Sophie Medlin:** Thank you for having me.

[00:14:52] **James Rowe:** Thank you.

[00:15:02] **James Rowe:** Thanks for listening to this podcast from Witch, the UK's consumer champion. You can find plenty more advice about what we discuss today in the show notes. There you'll also find a link to become a witch member for 50% off the usual price. An offer exclusively available to you are podcast listeners joining, which will not only give you access to all of our product reviews, our app, one-to-one, personalized buying advice, and every issue of which magazine across the air, but you'll also be helping us to make life simpler, fairer, and safer for everyone.

[00:15:31] **James Rowe:** Don't forget to hit subscribe wherever you list. That way you'll be notified whenever we release a new episode of Witch Money, which shorts or another podcast that we make for you. And if you wanna get in touch with us, then follow us on social media, where at witch uk, or you can drop us an email to podcasts@witch.co uk.

[00:15:48] **James Rowe:** See you next time.