

The Use of Dietary Supplements in Developing Countries

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Dietary supplements can be defined as products taken by the mouth which contain certain nutrient which is intended to supplement food and not to replace it. It comes in different forms a tablet, a pill, a capsule, or a liquid. The use of dietary supplements such as vitamins, minerals and herbs has increased dramatically over the past two decades.

This increase was not only in developed countries for example in the USA; it's an industry with 40 billion dollars worth. The use was also increased in developing countries as well. This increase can be explained by the effect of the globalization and due to improvement in health education and awareness in these countries. No doubt that some supplements can play an important role in health and are required to adjust certain health problems or to assist individuals to overcome nutrient deficiencies. For example calcium and vitamin D are important for healthy bones and folic acid for healthy embryos and gestation. There are several implications for using dietary supplements randomly in the developing countries which can be summarized as the following:

1. Imported dietary supplements are too expensive for the locals and can be an economic burden on them.
2. Locally produced dietary supplements are not regulated by any health agencies in these countries and are not tested for effectiveness and purity.
3. People in these countries can be misled about the functions of dietary supplements.
4. Dietary supplements could replace eating regular meals in some groups
5. People may go for higher doses of dietary supplements and could result in another health problem such as toxicity.
6. Taking dietary supplement without proper advice can also lead to interaction with drugs or nutrients.
7. Most dietary supplements are mislabeled.

8. There are no governmental agencies that supervises GMP of dietary supplements and this creates questions about quality.

These serious implications indicate that dietary supplements should not replace the healthy eating. Because healthy eating provides not only a single nutrient but provides group of nutrients. The nutritional needs can be met through balanced diet which is cheaper, cleaner and a source of other nutrients such as antioxidants.

Dietary supplements should be taken in certain situations. For example pregnant, nursing women, elderly and children. Other age groups should be totally dependent on health and balanced diet to get their nutrients.

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