Test your B IQ

Graham Butler, CNPA

"Experts recommend that we take vitamin B complex every day."

When we are feeling fatigued or anxious, many of us take vitamin B complex. But B vitamins are more than a pick-me-up. They are critical to a host of metabolic processes, as you will discover in the B-vitamin quiz.

Food is definitely the best source of B vitamins, but vitamin-B supplements are better choices for the elderly and for those people with inadequate diets.

B complex is a natural combination of vitamins B1, B2, B3, B6 (pantothenic acid), B12, folic acid, biotin, choline, inositol, and para-aminobenzoic acid (PABA). Experts recommend that we take a balanced B-complex vitamin every day, rather than supplement with individual B vitamins. Supplement with individual B vitamins only in an informed manner.

Graham Butler, CNPA, is a nutrition writer, member of alive magazine’s editorial advisory board, and a long-time advocate of natural health education and choice in health care.

Take this B-vitamin quiz

True or false? Answers are set out below.

1. Elderly people with low vitamin B1 (thiamine) levels—a common condition—saw improvements in quality of life, including lower blood pressure and reduced weight, when supplementing with thiamine.

True. Results of a randomly assigned, double-blind study of 222 people age 65 years and older were reported in 1997 in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. Study participants took 10 mg of vitamin B1 daily or placebo. After three months, those taking vitamin B1 reported enhanced quality of life, lower blood pressure, and weight reduction.

2. Vitamin B2 (riboflavin) may prevent migraines.

True. In 1998, Belgian researchers reported in the journal Neurology that they had compared 400 mg doses of riboflavin and placebo in 55 patients with migraines in a randomized trial of three months’ duration. Riboflavin was superior to placebo in reducing attack frequency and headache days.

3. Prescription drugs, including birth control pills, may deplete the body of B vitamins.

True. Oral contraceptive use has been linked to lower levels of vitamins B1, B2, and B6, and folic acid, although the relationship is inconsistent and poorly understood. Supplementation beyond current recommended daily allowances is not generally considered necessary.