VITAMINS WITH A CAUSE
Ribbon Nutrition, whose company mission is to lead the fight against breast cancer, donates up to 10 percent of its total revenue to nonprofit organizations, including Women Beyond Cancer and LifeSavingEmail.com, a free monthly breast cancer report. One of the young company’s top products, EMPOWER! Women’s Everyday Multi, is a food-based formula featuring herbs that balance the body and chelated minerals for better absorption.

CROSS-COUNTRY FAVORITES: B COMPLEX
Health food shoppers in Baxter, MN, prefer NOW Food’s Vitamin B-100 Caps High-Potency B Complex. The supplement supports energy production.

BIOTIN: Regulates Blood Sugar
Your body needs this little-known but vital B vitamin to make and regulate insulin, which in turn manages blood sugar levels. Biotin also activates some of the genes involved in metabolizing blood sugar, protein, and fats.

This vitamin is critical for people who are prediabetic or have developed type 2 diabetes. Some supplements combine biotin with chromium or R-lipoic acid, nutrients also involved in controlling blood sugar. Supplements of 2000mcg (2mg) daily have also been used to treat brittle fingernails and thinning hair.

Tips: Although the recommended amount is only 30mcg daily, much larger (and safe) doses are helpful to people with diabetes. Take 500–1000mcg three times daily with meals.

FOLIC ACID: Maintains Healthy Genes
Every cell and gene in your body depends on this B vitamin. Folic acid helps make, repair, and regulate the normal activities of genes. It’s known for preventing birth defects, such as spina bifida and cleft lip; mothers must take it in the first few weeks of pregnancy.

Folic acid supplements lower blood levels of homocysteine, a substance that increases the risk of heart disease and stroke. In a recent study, folic acid supplements (800mcg daily) slowed hearing loss in middle-age and older people by almost one-half. The same researchers also reported that folic acid improved mental function. Folic acid has also been shown to decrease the risk of many types of cancer, including breast, cervical, colon and lung cancers.

Tips: Take 400–800mcg daily; most multivitamins already contain 400mcg. Amounts up to 5000mcg (5mg) daily may produce greater benefits, but combine them with at least 100mcg of vitamin B12.

VITAMIN B2: Helps Prevent Migraines
Vitamin B2 may help prevent migraine headaches. In a European study, researchers found that almost two-thirds of 55 patients benefited from at least a 50 percent reduction in migraine headaches. Because the vitamin plays central roles in energy production, the
Bolster your immune system with American Health’s Ester-C, the gentler form of vitamin C. Patented Ester-C is nonacidic, making it easier on the digestive system. It contains naturally occurring vitamin C metabolites that maximize the absorption and retention—up to 24 hours longer—of vitamin C in your body. Suitable for vegans and also non-GMO.

CROSS-COUNTRY FAVORITES: VITAMIN C
Everyone’s after Solaray Buffered Super Bio-C vitamin C in Harrison, AR. It is time released to work over 12 hours.

Researchers believe that it might normalize energy production in brain cells.

Tips: For protecting against migraine headaches, take 400mg of vitamin B2 daily, in addition to a multivitamin or B-complex supplement.

VITAMIN B3: Lowers Cholesterol
More than 50 years ago, Canadian psychiatrists found that high doses of vitamin B3 (niacin), combined with vitamin C, were an effective treatment for recent-onset schizophrenia. The duo block the formation of an adrenaline-related hallucinogenic compound. Since then, research has also shown that the niacin (not niacinamide) form of vitamin B3 can lower cholesterol and triglyceride levels, as well as free fatty acids (another risk factor for heart disease).

Tips: Take 500–1000mg daily of niacin to lower cholesterol and raise HDL (“good”) cholesterol. Niacin often causes an hour-long flush, making your skin feel itchy. The effect, caused by the release of histamine, diminishes with daily use. There is a nonflushing form called inositol hexaniadrate that has cholesterol-lowering effects at doses of 2000–4000mg per day.

VITAMIN B6: Eases Carpal Tunnel Syndrome
Carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS) is considered a repetitive-motion disorder, most often affecting the wrists of cashiers, typists and factory workers. The repetitive motion stresses biochemicals that depend on vitamin B6 and sometimes other B vitamins. Supplements can often correct CTS in about 90 days. Extra vitamin B6 plus magnesium has been shown to ease anxiety associated with premenstrual syndrome.

Tips: Take 100–200mg daily for three months, reducing the dose to 50–100mg thereafter. Always take vitamin B6 with a multivitamin or B-complex supplement. Although it is more expensive than pyridoxine hydrochloride, pyridoxal phosphate is the most active form of vitamin B6 and you may be able to use a lower dose with it.

VITAMIN B12: Clears Mental Fog
More than one-third of seniors may have low vitamin B12 levels, often the result of poor absorption and a stomach condition known as atrophic gastritis. Nitric oxide, one of the drugs given during anesthesia, wipes out B12 levels. Deficiencies can sometimes mimic symptoms of severe brain fog and even Alzheimer’s disease. Because vitamin B12 is relatively inexpensive, everyone suspected of having Alzheimer’s or another type of dementia should have their B12 levels tested.

Tips: Take 100–1000mcg daily. If you think you might have absorption problems, take a sublingual (under the tongue) B12 supplement. Many common drugs, such as oral contraceptives, antibiotics and acid blockers interfere with vitamin B12 absorption.

VITAMIN C: Holds the Body Together
Nearly every animal makes prodigious amounts of vitamin C. Humans don’t because the species has inherited a damaged gene involved in vitamin C production. We need to get the vitamin from foods or supplements to replenish a natural metabolite. Vitamin C literally helps hold our bodies together. It’s needed to make collagen and elastin, two of the principal proteins of skin, cartilage, blood vessels and internal organs. In fact, vitamin C lotions can reduce wrinkles. Our immune system uses vitamin C to fight infections. Vitamin C also fights fatigue by helping to make carnitine, which enables cells to bum fat for energy.

This nutrient can improve the quality of life of terminal cancer patients. In a recent study, researchers found that large amounts of vitamin C improved appetite and physical, emotional and cognitive function, while it decreased fatigue, pain and nausea.

Tips: Take vitamin C with bioflavonoids—they’re synergistic. Divide your daily dose in three to maintain steady
blood levels. For overall health, take 500–1000mg daily. To fight colds and flu or cancer, increase the amount until your stools soften, then reduce the amount slightly. You'll tolerate more when you're sick, less when you're on the mend.

VITAMIN D: Enhances Disease Resistance
The recommended amounts (200–400 IU daily) are now regarded as woefully inadequate by the top docs at Harvard University and the Boston University Medical School. Without vitamin D, neither calcium nor magnesium can do their jobs. All three are needed for healthy bones and muscles.

Vitamin D triggers the production of powerful antimicrobial compounds, helping the body fight infections. An analysis of 63 studies found that vitamin D can reduce the risk of breast, colon and prostate cancers.

Tips: Opt for vitamin D3—the D2 form is less potent. Adults and children should take 1000 IU daily, but double that if you have a dark complexion. Many docs recommend 5000 IU daily. If you stand in the sun in a T-shirt and shorts for 15 minutes, you will make 10,000 IU.

VITAMIN E: Protects Heart and Nerves
Vitamin E reduces the risk of a heart attack, but its benefits can be reduced through commonly prescribed statins.

VITAMIN K: Builds Bone
Vitamin K has been quietly gaining attention for its pivotal role in bone health. The vitamin is needed to make bone proteins, part of the matrix that includes calcium and magnesium. In an analysis of seven studies of bone fracture, researchers determined that vitamin K supplements reduced hip fractures by almost 80 percent. The bone-building benefits may be enhanced with the addition of vitamin D supplements, says some research.

Tips: Vitamin K2, also known as menatetrenone, is the preferred form and is more active than K1 and K3. For long-term prevention, take 500–1000mcg daily. Studies of women with osteoporosis and a high risk of fracture used 45mg (4500mcg) daily of K2. Check with your doctor if you're taking blood-thinning drugs or before taking doses over 45mg.

Selecting the best multivitamin

A MULTIVITAMIN SHOULD form the foundation of your supplement regimen. Before you take a lot of individual nutrients, start with a quality multi. It’s the best way to shore up weak spots in your eating habits. Here’s how to find the best one for you.

Shop at a natural food store. Unlike conventional vitamins, natural multis are almost always free of sugars, artificial colors and allergenic fillers, such as lactose. You’re also more likely to find higher-potency multivitamins than many drugstore brands.

Opt for a multivitamin with at least 20mg of B1, B2, B3 and B6. It should also contain at least 100mcg of B12 and 400mcg of folic acid. At least 200mg of vitamin C is important, though you might want to take more separately.

Look for natural vitamin E. Natural vitamin E is listed as “d-alpha” as part of its chemical name. Synthetic vitamin E is “dl-alpha.”

Consider the supplement’s form. If you have trouble swallowing tablets, consider a hard or soft gelatin capsule. Many are now made from vegetarian sources. Hard gelatin capsules go down easier than tablets. Softgels go down the easiest.

Weigh the hassle factor. Some high-potency multis require you to take three or four supplements. You might prefer a brand that provides what you want in one or two capsules.