My Five Favorite Supplements for 2021

Wise supplementation is best based on nutritional testing to see what's good, what's low-- even what's high. But these are areas I've found useful for me over the past few months. And maybe worthy of checking yourself?

December 27, 2020 By Mike Barr

I've recently developed a renewed appreciation for minerals. Above all, magnesium and zinc. And it turns out that manganese is pretty important. (Review your Krebs cycle and Urea cycles if you don't believe me.) Manganese! When's the last time anyone ever thought of manganese? Nuts and seeds and things like oysters are among the best food sources for these things-- and probably the best way to try to get them. But in a pinch, supplementation from reputable companies has also proven effective.

Vitamin D levels in the time of coronavirus, obviously, seem worthy of keeping an eye on. And for those of us over 50, dementia risk is two fold higher for folks with suboptimal serum vitamin D levels.

And then vitamin C and selenium, not only for their role in maintenance & rebuilding of collagen, but also for their ability to recycle glutathione (the body's master antioxidant) also figure top on my list.

Last but not least, our lipid membranes. Not only are all of our cells lined in fat, but all our receptors-- for things like neurotransmitters and hormones (including insulin). Winter especially seems like a good time not to skimp on these essential fatty acids.

I recently also began experimenting with the so-called phospho-lipids, specifically something called phosphatidlyserine.

GlutaClear- Metagenics

Vitamin C, selenium, niacin (B3), n-acetyl-cysteine and bit of Brassica extracts added in-- to support glutathione production and function

Vitamin D3 liquid- Pure Encapsulations

I am reminded the officially sanctioned maximum RDA for vitamin D is something around 4,000 IU (or 100 mcg), but it really depends on where you're starting from-- and where you want to be. My 25-OH levels recently came in at 37. That's pretty far from the 50-60 range that nutritional medicine folks like to see. A neat trick I learned from someone at the IFM: you don't need to take

vitamin D every day, and once a week (at appropriately adjusted dosage) is just fine. And certainly easier for some. So I take 10,000-12,000 (even 20,000 sometimes!) IU a couple times a week, and then re-check my levels every couple of months.

Phosphatidylserine- Biotics Research

Try as I may, I just can't seem to manage a meditation practice now that I share 900 square feet with an OCD flatmate and a JRT. We take household mingling, indoor dining and travel proscriptions pretty seriously, so we pretty much co-exist at a low simmer since the cold weather set in. The yoga studios are shuttered. I risk frostbite in the park or rooftop. So to try to manage my surly cortisol levels I am left with phosphatidylserine. (Neither ashwaghanda nor rhodiola ever seemed to work for me.) Biotics' is from sunflower oil. I had tried another brand made from soy and decided I prefer this version. An added bonus if you are the dry and brittle type: your skin, hair and nails could very well become smooth, luxurious, strong almost instantly.

Olprima EPA- Standard Process

While we fetishize the omega three's, it's important to get a full range of these essential fatty acids. I have recently found that many people are actually overdoing it on the 3's and low on the 6's, thus my new appreciation for a broader spectrum formulation. You'll need to DM me for pass code for access to their products.

Zinc Supreme- Designs for Health

In some ways this is like Red Bull in a capsule, minus the caffeine. DFH mixes in riboflavin (B2) and B6-- an essential co-factor for neurotransmitter production and function. And some taurine to boot.

Cenitol- Metagenics

Who can't use a little extra nervous system support? Even pre-Covid, I suffered from kind of chronic musculoskeletal tension from this super high volume clinic I was working in (in order to pay for higher level training in nutritional medicine). I hadn't realized at the time that not only are just about all Americans deficient in magnesium, but that under conditions of chronic stress, we need and use up even more. Cenitol is magnesium bis-glycinate with a bit of inositol (sometimes referred to as vitamin B8!). I like this powdered form because it makes it so easy. While some people don't seem to mind taking fistfuls of pills every day, I say the fewer the better.

One final note: while the effect of phosphatidylserine and even the magnesium (in terms of help with sleep and relaxation) can be noticed quite quickly even immediately in some cases, it is said to take much longer for the mineral and fatty acid composition within our blood cells and cell receptors to transform. Guidance ranges from four weeks for magnesium to ten weeks for fatty acid and cholesterol rebuilding, so adjust expectations and re-testing plans accordingly.

If you don't know where to start with some of this nutritional testing, feel free to contact me. More every day, it seems, the standard lab companies, LabCorp, Quest and the like, are offering some of these tests. The gold standard for testing magnesium and zinc, it should be noted, are intracellular or ionized and RBC ratios, respectively. Plasma levels are pretty much useless,

especially for magnesium, but if you can get RBC that’s the next best.

Mike Barr, a longtime Poz Contributing Editor and founding member of and scribe for the Treatment Action Group (TAG), is a functional medicine practitioner and herbalist in NYC. Reach out to him here.

Feel free too to sign up for his curated (and generously discounted) professional grade supplement store. The site boasts both his current personal favorites— Quicksilver Scientific, Biocidin, Microbiome Labs, Metagenics— as well as stalwarts, Apex Energetics, Biotics Research, Nordic Naturals, Standard Process/MediHerb, Douglas Labs, Pure Encapsulations, Thorne, Designs For Health and others.

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