

EXPERT ADVICE

Ask the Pharmacist

The pharmacist is the best source of information to help you get the most out of your medicine. Here to answer your questions on medicine is Khew Hon Meng, a pharmacist with over 8 years of experience. He is currently managing an independent pharmacy in Rawang.

HIGH INTAKE OF VITAMINS

Q: I would like to know whether there is any harm in taking large amounts of vitamins and minerals?

A: Taking excessive amounts of certain vitamins and minerals in the long term can be harmful to health. This is more of a concern with vitamins A, D, E and K, which are fat soluble vitamins and are stored in the tissues of the body. Over-consumption of vitamin A can cause nausea, headaches and blurred vision, and in cases of pregnant women, it can cause birth defects. Taking too much of vitamin D can lead to feeling of weakness and loss of appetite.

Water soluble vitamins such as vitamin C and B vitamins are excreted when you take in more than your body needs. However, high levels of vitamin B6 can cause nerve damage.

As for minerals, overdose of iron can cause damage to the liver, heart and pancreas. High blood level of selenium can result in gastrointestinal upsets, hair and nail changes, garlic breath odour, and mild nerve damage. High doses of magnesium can cause muscle weakness, troubled breathing, and low blood pressure in individuals with impaired kidney function.

If you follow the guidelines given on the labels of the vitamin and mineral supplements, you should have no problems of toxicity.



HELP FOR AN ACHING BACK

Q: I have been experiencing lower back pain. What can I do to relieve the pain?

A: Lower back pain is usually caused by irritation of a nerve root near the spine or minor damage to the ligaments and muscles in the back due to strain from lifting, twisting or bending. In some cases, it could be a symptom of a more serious condition. Generally, lower back pain can be relieved and prevented by doing exercises to strengthen the back muscles, practicing good sitting posture, learning to bend and lift properly, and maintaining a healthy weight. Medications to treat this problem include nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) such as ibuprofen, muscle relaxants, and topical analgesics. You can also apply a cold pack as soon as possible following trauma to reduce initial inflammation and to relief pain by numbing the affected area. Heat therapy helps to relax muscle and increase blood flow.

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