

[TREND ON TRIAL]

DO YOU NEED A CUSTOMIZED MULTIVITAMIN?

“Silver” multivitamin formulas for seniors have been around for decades, and other blends (e.g., women’s, performance) have become increasingly popular. But the latest specialty supplements to hit markets are multivitamins made for people taking prescriptions, such as statins for high cholesterol and antidepressants, that can cause nutritional deficiencies. But are these customized multivitamins worth price tags roughly three times those of standard formulas?

PROS: There is some support for the *idea* of developing med-specific multivitamins. For example, studies suggest that up to 30 percent of people who take metformin, a common diabetes medication, have reduced absorption of vitamin B₁₂. And science has documented that some people who suffer from depression have low blood levels of B vitamins, including folate.

CONS: Not everyone who takes a medication will experience the nutritional deficiencies sometimes associated with that drug. And for those who do, supplements aren’t always the answer, says John Buse, M.D., Ph.D., president for medicine and science at the American Diabetes Association: “Perhaps the more reasonable thing to do is to work toward replacing less nutritious foods with more nutritious ones.” What’s more, in cases where re-

search suggests that supplementing a certain nutrient may be beneficial, the formulas being marketed aren’t always the same as those tested, says James Lake, M.D., chair of the American Psychiatric Association’s Caucus on Complementary, Alternative & Integrative Care. For example, a new multivitamin targeted at people taking antidepressants, such as Prozac, includes folic acid (along with vitamins B₆, B₁₂ and D); however, most clinical trials showing benefits of supplementing folate in people with depression use folinic acid (another form of the nutrient) by itself.

BOTTOM LINE: Talk with your doctor about all possible side effects, including nutritional deficiencies, of your prescriptions. He or she can help you decide if you should supplement any nutrients and, if so, the best way to do that. —*Cheryl Sternman Rule*

