



ESL Podcast 349 – Taking Vitamins and Supplements

GLOSSARY

checkup – a periodic medical exam to evaluate one’s health, usually once a year
* At Rick’s last checkup, the doctor told him that eating less salt would lower his blood pressure.

dietary supplement – non-food items, usually pills or herbal teas, that are taken to improve one’s nutrition or health

* Many people take ginseng as a dietary supplement because they think it will improve their memory.

vitamin – a substance that is found in plant and/or animal foods and needs to be eaten for good health

* Oranges, lemons, and grapefruit have a lot of vitamin C.

mineral – a substance that is found in the earth and needs to be eaten for good health

* Which foods are good sources of magnesium and other minerals?

balanced diet – a combination of healthy foods that are eaten regularly and give one all the necessary nutrition

* A balanced diet includes lots of whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and dairy products.

nutrient – something that a human or animal needs to eat in order to live and be healthy

* It’s better to get your nutrients from natural foods than from processed, fortified foods.

multivitamin – a pill that contains many different vitamins and minerals

* This multivitamin is specifically designed to meet the nutritional needs of older adults.

chewable – able to be chewed; able to be crushed between one’s teeth and then swallowed

* Ingrid takes a chewable, orange-flavored vitamin C tablet every morning.

deficiency – lack; absence; less than the amount that one should have or needs to have

* Some women have problems with memory because they have an iron deficiency.



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better to be safe than sorry – a phrase used to show that it is better to spend money and time on prevention now than to pay the negative consequences of one's careless actions later

* They decided to buy more flood insurance for their home because it's better to be safe than sorry.

to overdose – to take too much of a medicine or other drug and then get sick or die

* The teenager overdosed on her medication and almost died in the hospital.

over-the-counter – medicines that are available without a doctor's prescription; medicines that can be bought in a store without a doctor's permission

* Aspirin is an over-the-counter medication.

recommended dosage – the amount of a medicine that should be taken, either according to a doctor's instructions or the instructions on the box

* The recommended dosage of this antibiotic is 200 mg every 8 hours.

to tolerate – to be able to be exposed to something without being harmed or injured

* I'm amazed by how much noise airport workers can tolerate!

to absorb – to take in and use a substance, often through one's body tissues

* Your body can absorb more of the medicine if you take it with meals.

all the more – even more; much more; significantly more

* If you don't make very much money, that's all the more reason to start saving as much as you can for retirement.

to neglect – to not take good care of something; to abandon; to not pay enough attention to something

* Randy neglected their garden last summer and now it's full of weeds.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does the doctor want him to start taking a multivitamin?
 - a) Because it can cause a deficiency.
 - b) Because it is part of his new exercise routine.
 - c) Because it can help him get all his nutrients.

2. How might one overdose on a medication?
 - a) By taking less than the recommended dosage.
 - b) By taking the exact recommended dosage.
 - c) By taking more than the recommended dosage.

WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to absorb

The verb “to absorb,” in this podcast, means to take in and use a substance, often through one’s body tissues: “This sunscreen absorbs into the skin very quickly.” Or, “How long does the oatmeal need to cook before it absorbs all the water?” The verb “to absorb” also means to understand something: “There was a lot of information to absorb at the four-day conference.” Sometimes the verb “to absorb” means to interest someone very much, so much so that one doesn’t pay attention to other things: “The physicist’s husband often complains that she is too absorbed in her research.” Finally, “to absorb” can mean to reduce the strength of two objects hitting each other: “The front part of the car absorbed most of the impact during the accident.”

to neglect

In this podcast, the verb “to neglect” means to not take good care of something: “The city has neglected its roads for years, so now it needs to make a lot of street repairs.” The verb “to neglect” also means to not pay enough attention to something: “The children often feel neglected by their father, because he’s always at work and never has time to play games with them.” Finally, the verb “to neglect” can mean to forget to do something or to fail to do something: “She neglected to add the sugar while she was making chocolate-chip cookies, so they tasted terrible!” Or, “They neglected to warn their customers that their prices were going to increase in the fall.”



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CULTURE NOTE

In the United States, the “Food and Drug Administration” (FDA) is the “agency” (governmental organization) responsible for “regulating” (making rules and laws about) foods and drugs. The agency tries to make sure that the foods and drugs that are being sold are safe for Americans.

The FDA regulates dietary supplements as foods “rather than” (instead of) drugs. Many people believe that this is wrong and should be changed.

“Pharmaceutical” (related to making medicines) companies have to “prove” (show that something is true) that their drugs are safe. However, since dietary supplements are not considered to be drugs, the companies that make dietary supplements don’t have to meet this requirement. The FDA can act only if a dietary supplement has been shown to be “harmful” (causing pain, sickness, or death).

There are some “restrictions” (limitations) on dietary supplements. For example, the “packaging” (the boxes, bottles, and text that are used around the product) cannot make “claims” (statements that something is true) about the “health benefits” (the ways that something is good for one’s health) of dietary supplements without including the following text: “These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.” It is “illegal” (against the law) to market a dietary supplement as a “cure” (solution to a medical problem) for a disease.

Many doctors and researchers are worried that some dietary supplements hurt the people who take them. For example, many “herbal teas” (teas made from leaves other than tea leaves) have been shown to “interfere” (change a situation) with the “effectiveness” (ability to do something well) of other medications. These people are “lobbying” (asking the government to do something) for better regulation of dietary supplements.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 349: Taking Vitamins and Supplements.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 349. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is eslpod.com. If you go there, you can download a Learning Guide for this episode, an 8 to 10 page PDF file that contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, additional definitions, comprehension questions, cultural notes, winning lottery numbers, and a complete transcript for this episode.

This episode is called "Taking Vitamins and Supplements." It's a story about how I go to the doctor, and the doctor tells me to take some pills to help me. Let's get started.

[start of story]

The last time I went to the doctor for a checkup, she told me that I needed to start taking some dietary supplements that had the vitamins and minerals that my body needed to stay healthy. I told her that I ate a balanced diet, but she said that many people who generally ate well still didn't get the nutrients their bodies needed every day, and that's why she recommends taking a multivitamin. I remember taking chewable vitamins when I was a kid, but as an adult, I never thought I needed it. It wasn't because I had any signs of deficiency, she said, but that it was better to be safe than sorry.

I asked if it was possible to overdose on over-the-counter multivitamins, and she said that it was highly unlikely if I followed the recommended dosage. She said that most people's bodies are able to tolerate and absorb the multivitamins without any problems. As I get older, she said, it's all the more important to take care of myself.

She's right, of course. I shouldn't neglect my health. I just wonder if I can find some of those chewable vitamins in the shape of my favorite cartoon characters. I may be an adult, but I don't always have to act like one!

[end of story]



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Our story begins by me saying, “The last time I went to the doctor for a checkup...” A “checkup,” as a noun, is when you go to doctor on a yearly or regular schedule to have him or her look at your health. Usually, it’s once a year; they take some tests, they look at you, they check your blood pressure and other things to make sure that there isn’t any major problems, medically speaking, with you. “To check up,” as two words, is the verb – to investigate something, to make sure that something is happening. But, this is the noun, “checkup,” and it is the act of going to your doctor for an annual or regular medical examination.

My doctor told me that I needed to start taking some dietary supplements. “Dietary” comes from the word “diet,” which can mean the food that you eat – usually does. “Dietary supplements” are things that are not foods, but things that you eat, usually pills, or things that you drink like a tea, that are taken to improve your health or your nutrition. Some people take dietary supplements such as vitamins and minerals. A “vitamin” (vitamin) is something that is found in a plant or animal foods, and needs to be eaten for good health. So, vitamin C, for example, is a vitamin that some people take because they want to make sure that they have enough vitamin C. A “mineral” is something found in the earth, and like a vitamin it needs to be taken so that your body has good health. Vitamins and minerals are the most common types of dietary supplements that people take.

These supplements are very popular in the United States, especially in places such as California. There are many people who take vitamins and other supplements because they think it is necessary for their health. Not all doctors agree with that however, but in places such as California, for whatever reason, it’s very popular.

I told my doctor that I ate a balanced diet. Here we see the word “diet” again, meaning the food that you eat. If you say you eat a “balanced diet,” you mean that you have a good combination of healthy foods – fruits, vegetables, what we would call “whole grains,” things like brown rice or whole wheat bread. These examples of things that might be in a “balanced diet,” meaning you have enough of each thing. If you have a balanced diet, many people believe, including many doctors, that you don’t need to take extra vitamins or minerals; some people do, anyway.

My doctor says that I should take vitamins and minerals because even people who generally eat well still don’t get the nutrients their bodies need. A “nutrient” (nutrient) is something that you need in order to live – in order to be healthy, that’s why she recommends taking a multivitamin. A “multivitamin” means many vitamins – “multi” means many. A multivitamin has many different vitamins and



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minerals in one pill, so instead of taking a separate pill for vitamin C and vitamin E and vitamin B-12, you take one vitamin pill that has all of those in it.

I say that I remember taking chewable vitamins when I was a kid. Something that is “chewable” is something that you can put in your mouth and crush in between your teeth. That is, something that you can make smaller by using your teeth so that you can swallow it. Chewable vitamins are very popular for children. They are often different colors and different flavors, and come in different shapes – animal shapes, cartoon characters shapes – that will make the child want to take it. The child chews it, and then swallows it.

The doctor said that I didn’t have any “signs,” any indications, of a deficiency. If something is “deficient,” we mean it lacks something, it doesn’t have something, it’s less than what it should be. If you had a “vitamin deficiency,” you would be lacking, or not having enough of certain vitamins.

My doctor said that it was better to be safe than sorry. That’s an old expression; “better to be safe than sorry” means even though you may not need to do something, it may be a good idea to do it just in case there’s a problem in future. We often use this expression when we talk about doing something that will help prevent a problem in the future.

I ask my doctor if it is possible to overdose on over-the-counter multivitamins. “To overdose” means to take too much of a medicine or another drug, and that makes you sick or, possibly even kills you. You don’t want to overdose! “Over-the-counter drugs” are drugs that you can buy without a doctor’s “prescription,” that is, the doctor’s permission. In the U.S., there are many drugs that you can buy without your doctor telling you it’s okay – without having to give you what we would call a “prescription,” which is permission to take this drug. The “counter” is the place in a store where you pay for something – where you buy something. So, “over-the-counter” refers to drugs that you don’t need a prescription for.

My doctor said it was very unlikely I would overdose if I followed the recommended dosage. “Dosage” (dosage) is the amount of medicine that you should take, either because that is what your doctor tells you, or that is what the company that makes the drug tells you. The “recommended dosage” – how much of the drug should you take.

My doctor said, “most people’s bodies are able to tolerate and absorb the multivitamins without any problems.” “To tolerate,” as a verb, means to be able to be “exposed” to something – to have contact with something – without being harmed or injured or hurt. To “absorb” means to take in and use a substance,



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usually in your body. So, your body absorbs the vitamin C – it takes the vitamin C in and uses it. “To absorb” has a couple of different meanings; take a look at our Learning Guide for an additional explanation.

I say that as I get older, it’s all the more important to take care of myself. The expression “all the more” means the same here as even more, or much more. I could say, “it’s much more important to take care of myself,” it means the same thing. “It’s all the more important.”

I say that I shouldn’t neglect my health. “To neglect” (neglect) means not to take care of something, not to do something that you should do, not to pay attention to something. If you neglected your homework, you didn’t do your homework. If you neglected your dog, you wouldn’t talk to your dog, or pay attention to your dog, or play with your dog. If you neglected your wife, you would have to find a new place to live!

Now let’s listen to the story, this time at a normal speed.

[start of story]

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I asked if it was possible to overdose on the over-the-counter multivitamins, and she said that it was highly unlikely if I followed the recommended dosage. She said that most people’s bodies are able to tolerate and absorb the multivitamins without any problems. As I get older, she said, it’s all the more important to take care of myself.

She’s right, of course. I shouldn’t neglect my health. I just wonder if I can find some of those chewable vitamins in the shape of my favorite cartoon characters. I may be an adult, but I don’t always have to act like one!

[end of story]

The script for this episode was written by Dr. Lucy Tse.



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From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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