

Pooja Vig's Ask If There's Food For Thought column (Mind Your Body, Nov 22) on managing diabetes with supplements has drawn reactions from the Singapore Nutrition and Dietetics Association and Patrick Holford, founder of the Institute for Optimum Nutrition. Their letters are printed below. Ms Vig's reply and Mind Your Body's response are on the facing page

Taking nutrients to manage diabetes: Get advice from qualified dietitians

I refer to Ms Pooja Vig's reply to the question "Manage diabetes with supplements?" (Mind Your Body, Nov 22, page 18).

The Singapore Nutrition and Dietetics Association agrees that lifestyle modifications such as dietary changes, adherence to medications and increased physical activity are the cornerstones to diabetes management.

We would like to dispute some of the recommendations and claims on specific foods or nutrients for the management of diabetes mentioned in Ms Vig's reply. There is, to date, insufficient supportive scientific evidence to substantiate the quantity required for specific nutrients such as antioxidants, chromium, fish oils, ayurvedic herb gymnema, cinnamon, bitter melon and fenugreek, to improve one's blood glucose control. The therapeutically safe amounts

published its nutrition recommendations in the Diabetes Care journal (September 2006). These latest evidence-based recommendations for diabetes medical nutrition therapy are based on more than 100 reports and reviews of scientific and clinical evidence.

Under its nutrition recommendations for the management of diabetes, there is no clear evidence supporting the benefits from vitamin or mineral supplementation in people without any underlying nutrient deficiencies. There are exceptions for older adults with reduced intake, where a daily multivitamin supplement can be appropriate.

It is not advisable to routinely supplement one's diet with antioxidants such as Vitamin E, C and carotene, due to lack of evidence of efficacy and uncertainties in long-term safety of these supplements in concentrated amounts.

Researchers have yet to adequately demonstrate the efficacy of individual herbs and supplements in diabetes management. Furthermore, herbal preparations may interact with other medications. Therefore, it is important to always check with your doctor, pharmacist or dietitian before taking them.

We are aware that there is a keen interest in nutrition topics in the media, and information is widely and freely available. However, we would strongly recommend the public to scrutinise the source and author of the information and advice at all times. It is common that nutrition facts, recommendations and claims are often misinterpreted when applied in different contexts.

The Singapore Nutrition and Dietetics Association is the professional association for nutritionists and dietitians in Singapore. All our full members have credible qualifications in nutrition. Dietitians are professionals whom you should consult if you need evidence-based, and most importantly safe, advice for dietary management of diseases such as diabetes, gout, heart, liver or kidney failure. You can make an appointment to see a dietitian in the hospitals, polyclinics or private clinics with a referral letter from your doctor. Ms Vig is currently not a full member of our association.

Members of the public who want to know if the dietitians they have consulted are qualified can search for them on our website.