**Should Kids Be Taking Vitamin Supplements For Ideal Growth?**

**Source: Dr. Susanta Kumar Badatya, Apollo Cradle**

How often does an ad on television convince you to buy nutritional or vitamin supplements for your child? Seeing the child on TV grow taller, healthier and smarter makes any parent want the same for their child. It makes you believe that even your child should take these wonderfully flavoured supplements available so easily, at your nearest chemist or supermarket. Yet, once you look at the huge variety of choices available, you are left confused.

The big question is deciding which one is apt for your child's growing needs. Should you opt for a protein drink? Or something that is high on calcium? Or a probiotic supplement? And then arises another even more important question - Does your child even need these assorted supplements? Is it necessary for your kid to have additional vitamin supplements, if he or she has a regular diet, gets plenty of exercise and is fairly healthy, overall?

As parents, you should take the final call in making these choices, and not feel pressured into doing it simply because other parents are. The first thing you should do is have a conversation with your paediatrician regarding growth pattern according to age-appropriate growth norms and understand what your child's age-specific needs are.

**Do All Kids Need To Be Given Supplements For Ideal Growth?**

Firstly, breastfed babies do not require any other nutrition, as a mother's milk has everything that a child needs. Quite often, when a child is growing she/he tends to suddenly appear more skinny and thinner than before. You might begin to feel that your son/daughter is lacking nutrition and stamina. If a child, above the age of one year, is eating a nourishing diet, playing outdoors, is energetic and is getting sufficient sleep, then additional supplements are usually not required. However if a child has taken a round of antibiotics, their gut bacteria is diminished, then a dietary or probiotic supplement under the guidance of a paediatrician can compensate for the loss of nutrients. Most supplements available are fairly good, and very useful when kids have not been eating properly, are having junk food and snacks too often, finicky about their food or have recently recovered after being unwell.

**What Should You Look For When Buying Supplements**

The first thing to check when you have decided to buy supplements is whether or not the supplements have been derived from whole food sources. You can opt for these over supplements extracted from non-food material. Second, look at the dosage prescribed for vitamins and minerals. Often, it may be recommended just for a few weeks and should be stopped after that. Overdosing will do more harm than good. Third, look at food options that you can include in your daily diet and make your child eat that instead. And finally, know that even if you created a perfect meal plan with all the right nutrients, every single day, it might still be imperfect in some way. There's no ideal, fool-proof way to give your child all the right nourishment, all the time. So, the best thing to do is encourage your child to eat right, try out new foods and flavours, and create a balance of play, studies and fun. Keep your paediatrician posted with any sudden changes, and more than anything, trust yourself as a parent on making the right decisions for your child.