

Fortifying Junk Food



Is it possible to make junk food healthy simply by adding vitamins? Perhaps we should also ask: can pigs fly?

Junk food, by definition, is high in calories, (typically fat and/or sugar) but low in nutrients. Adding vitamins and minerals to junk food is a marketing ploy designed to entice us into purchasing more junk food, somehow fooling ourselves into believing that a candy bar with added vitamins can replace a healthy snack or meal.

Miriam Nestle, PhD, MPH, Professor in the Department of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health at New York University, highlights the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) "jelly bean" rule. This rule prohibits the addition of nutrients to candy and soft drinks. Why? Because blurring the lines between junk food and nutrient-dense food makes it

more difficult for consumers to make healthy choices.

The FDA's Code of Federal Regulations also establishes guidelines for the rational addition of individual nutrients to foods. It states, "The Food and Drug Administration does not encourage indiscriminate addition of nutrients to foods, nor does it consider it appropriate to fortify fresh produce; meat, poultry, or fish products; sugars; or snack foods such as candies and carbonated beverages."

In his book, *In Defense of Food*, Michael Pollan talks about "nutritionism," a belief that if a processed food like candy, sweetened breakfast cereal, or a protein bar contains added vitamins and minerals, it's somehow a healthful food. That belief is flawed. Candy is candy, even if it has added vitamins or minerals.

We all know that candy isn't healthy. That doesn't mean we can't enjoy something sweet and delicious periodically; it merely means that we know it shouldn't replace the vegetables, fruit, and whole grains that naturally contain a wide variety of vitamins and minerals. Whole, less processed foods not only offer the energy we need to power us through our busy days, but they also have a wide variety of the vitamins and minerals we need for overall good health.

Instead of spending money on candy fortified with vitamins to give you an energy boost, enjoy a variety of healthful foods, drink plenty of water, and get optimum amounts of sleep. Your body will thank you.

By Lynn Grieger, RDN, CDE, CPT, CWC

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