

## BOOK REVIEW

# Dietary Supplements and Functional Foods

by Geoffrey P Webb, 2006, 256 pages, softcover, \$79.99. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, United Kingdom.

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The use of dietary supplements in the United States and the United Kingdom is widespread, and it is also a growing practice in other industrialized countries. Many books and websites provide detailed descriptions of the various ingredients in supplements and advice on use, serving primarily as reference works to be consulted for specific information as needed. Geoffrey P Webb, a Senior Lecturer in Nutrition and Physiology at the University of East London (London, United Kingdom), takes a different approach in this book. He has provided a brief introduction to supplements, which is meant to be read from cover to cover.

The book's first chapter provides an overview of the growing use of supplements and the reasons for their use, the relative merits of various study methods to evaluate supplement efficacy and safety, the legal definitions of supplements, and the regulation of these products in the United States and United Kingdom. The second chapter includes a discussion of micronutrient adequacy, emphasizing the Reference Nutrient Intake (RNI) standard in the United Kingdom and secondarily the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) of the United States [but without a discussion of the United States' Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs)].

Most of the book examines individual vitamins, minerals, fatty acids—what the author calls "nonessential 'nutrients'"—ie, glucosamine, chondroitin, S-adenosyl-L-methionine, choline, lecithin, carnitine, creatine, coenzyme Q10, lipoic acid, and methylsulfonylmethane—and 17 "plant and animal extracts," including ginkgo, chitosan, and echinacea. Each substance's basic biochemistry, effects on human metabolism, recommended intakes, and provenance are explained, and one or more health-related claims—eg, ginseng for psychological well-being, athletic performance, and cancer prevention—are briefly evaluated. The book's best chapter provides a balanced discussion of free radicals, the oxidant theory of disease, mechanisms to limit free-radical damage, antioxidants in food, and the potential benefits and risks of antioxidant supplements.

This book's title suggests that functional foods receive substantial attention, but such is not the case. The final chapter addresses these products in a cursory way, primarily as a vehicle to discuss sterols and stanols, phytoestrogens (primarily from soy), and probiotics and prebiotics—ingredients that are also available in supplements.

*Dietary Supplements and Functional Foods* appears to be intended for health science students, at the college level and beyond, who, Webb says, "have limited specialist nutritional background." However, it cannot serve as a well-rounded introductory text on the subject without providing extensive supplementary materials on such topics as the regulation of supplements and issues of product quality and labeling. The book suffers from the inclusion of dated information on nutrient intakes and supplement use, and the reference list both is relatively small and omits superior and more up-to-date citations. Readers may be disappointed in the book's small size, given the broad and multifaceted nature of the topic, the high price, the emphasis on British nutrient standards and dietary or supplement patterns, and the

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degree of expertise of the author, who began to seriously study dietary supplement issues only ≈5 y ago.

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