

## Get Green

### The pros and cons of green supplements

Written by Kelly S. Thompson

These days, finding ways to get the appropriate serving of vegetables can be a challenge. When cooking healthy family meals that appeal to kids and adults alike, getting the recommended five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables isn't always easy. Our bodies need the vitamins, minerals and other nutritional benefits of these dietary powerhouses, and a lack of fruits and veggies can mean mineral and vitamin deficiencies in our system.

Green powders are the newest entrants on the scene of dietary supplements, comprised of various greens such as algae, kale, alfalfa and other nutrient-packed ingredients. Green supplements come in the form of a pill or powder that can be mixed into water or smoothies, helping even the most veggie-resistant eater reap the benefits of meeting dietary recommendations, often packing the equivalent of seven servings of vegetables in one serving. Products such as VegeGreens, Greens+ and others claim to boost energy, fight illnesses and offer all the benefits of leafy greens in the ease of a small scoop or pill.

While green powders can be great for the immune system, there are many factors to consider before rushing out to make a purchase. Much like the business of multivitamins, all green supplements are not created equal. According to Consumer Lab, more than one third of all green powders do not contain all the ingredients listed on the bottle. "The ingredient list, while often impressive, can contain very

small or 'sub-therapeutic' amounts of many coveted substances," says Dr. Jacqueline Keeney, who also teaches with the Canadian Health Food Association's Certified Natural Products Advisor program. "Sometimes consumers end up spending lots of extra money on very small amounts of popular extracts or fibre fillers." And the origin of the product matters too. Some elements to consider would be if the ingredients are organic, how the contents are ground down (how processed is it?) and not only the ingredient list, but how much of daily recommended nutrients and minerals are being offered with each scoop.

Of course, taste is another factor in green supplement selection, and each has its own flavour profile and sweetness. Palatability is usually come by through stevia or other healthy sugar alternatives, meaning

your green powder won't taste like straight blended kale. "It can take a little while to get used to a greens beverage, however, it is worth the plethora of health benefits," said Dr. Keeney. Ultimately, taste is a preference unique to each consumer, so you may need to sample a few before finding the one that sits with your palate. To enhance the flavour, some people choose to mix with water while others like green powders added to their daily smoothies.

Ultimately, if you choose to use a green supplement, do your research to ensure that the product contains what it claims. What we put into our bodies is a personal choice, and for those who would rather forgo fruits and veggies when they make an appearance on the dinner plate, green powder supplements can be the added boost to fill any nutritional gaps left behind.



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## SLIT Allergies be gone

Written by Kelly S. Thompson

Allergies plague at least one in six Canadians, according to the CBC, a number that is nothing to scoff at considering the wide-spanning climate of our country. With symptoms ranging from itchy and watery eyes to congested noses, having allergies is akin to coping with a perpetual cold.

For years, researchers have been trying to discover the magic that will cure allergy sufferers, but other than temporarily reducing symptoms, little headway has been made except for the administration of weekly allergy shots. "The immune system is one of the more complex systems in the human body, and one that still isn't fully understood, from a scientific perspective," said Dr. Jacqueline Keeney, a naturopath in practice for more than a decade who often treats patients suffering with allergies. Allergy shots are time consuming since they have to be administered at a doctor's office. And for patients who fear needles, they would often rather suffer with hay fever.

More doctors and naturopaths are turning to Sublingual Immunotherapy (SLIT) as a more permanent reduction of allergy symptoms through desensitization, allowing patients to treat themselves at home after the initial assessment. In 1998, SLIT was recognized by the World Health Organization as an alternative to injections, and the therapy accounts for 40 percent of allergy treatments in Europe.

### How does it work?

Patients are given a standard allergy before the doctor has a laboratory mix a concoction of drops made specifically for each patient's allergens. Daily, patients express one drop of their prescribed liquid underneath their tongue. There is little to no taste and common reactions are usually limited to an itchy mouth. "While there are some general steps that people can take to ease allergy symptoms and susceptibility, individualized homeopathy, desensitizing therapy (NAET, sublingual, etc), alternative testing and manual therapies tend to get the best results," said Dr. Keeney.

SLIT treatments can be done seasonally, approximately two months before typical allergy season, or as a treatment plan over a period of months or years. SLIT works in conjunction with other treatments, so patients are still able to take antihistamines and other medications while treating their allergies through this unique exposure method, which is often covered by extended health plans or provincial care.

### Then what?

Ultimately, patients are desensitized to their allergic responses. Over a course of several years, many allergy sufferers find that they no longer have allergic responses or their symptoms have decreased to a point where they no longer require medication.

Even those undergoing SLIT should seek other methods of reducing their symptoms, and often the best complement can be simple, at-home solutions. Dr. Keeney recommends avoidance of known allergens combined with a more conscious approach to eating and living. "Even though you might be having trouble with environmental allergies to something like pollen, diet can play a role," said Dr. Keeney. "By decreasing your exposure to foods that cause irritation, you are avoiding the additive effect of inflammation, which worsens allergic symptoms."

As a less invasive alternative to injections, SLIT is perfect for children and those who are afraid of needles or simply don't want to spend an afternoon a week in a doctor's office.



Kelly S. Thompson

Kelly S. Thompson is an award-winning writer and editor and former officer in the Canadian Armed Forces. She has published in *Chatelaine*, *Enterprise*, the *Tyee* and others and is the 2013 winner of the Barbara Novak Award for Personal Essay. She lives and works in Trenton, Ontario.

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