

HFMA Bulletin

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Nutrition just got personal – or did it?

I'm often told that the big new thing in supplements is 'personalized nutrition'. Apparently it represents not just a new era in nutrition science, but a whole new paradigm in the way supplements will be bought. There's been an influx of online start-ups offering personalized nutrition programmes, and what's so fantastic about it is that people can just jump on to a website, answer some simple questions and, hey presto, they will be presented with a personalized supplement regime. Then, having signed up to a subscription, the supplements will arrive monthly, all carefully divided into daily packs.

It's such a great idea I wonder why it's never been thought of before! And it means that we won't need nutritional therapists or health food stores as all their knowledge and expertise can be condensed into 20 or 30 questions that can be answered in just 15 minutes. The programmes are not all the same; some are based on your diet and life stage, others draw heavily on any health conditions you might have. Of course, we are reassured that the questions have been carefully designed by medics and nutritionists and that the supplement regime will be expertly formulated to closely fit your requirements. Most of the regimes also come with a description of why each supplement has been selected, some using health claims that are mind boggling in this age of EFSA health claims regulations.

From this you might think I am against the whole concept of personalized nutrition, but I'm absolutely not. In fact, I'm fascinated by the idea, and of course recognize

that each person needs a nutrition programme tailored to their individual needs. However, I personally think that very few of the programmes I tried are logical in their recommendation. But that's just my opinion – although it's astonishing how different the recommended supplements are between the programmes, even if you input the same personal details into all of them.

If a normal consumer tried several companies, they'd be bewildered by the hugely diverse 'personalized' supplement regimes being offered to them. Some of these differences are obviously due to the views of the experts that created the algorithms, but I also think that the recommendations were highly influenced by the selection of bulk tablets available to be put into the daily packs. One regime seemed to rely on just 12 tablet variants, raising the question of how 'personalized' the programmes could ever be! Other regimes seemed to draw from a wider choice of bulk tablets and capsules, but even so, the numbers of variants are tiny compared to the huge choice of products available in a health food store.

This brings me to my point, which is that personalized supplement regimes have been available for decades – just try visiting a health food shop! Here you'll get friendly, helpful and expert advice and a fantastic choice of products, all at a lower cost than the pre-prepared daily packs. And if someone wants an even more in-depth programme, that will include advice on dietary adjustments, not just a supplement regime, then they should try seeing a nutritional therapist.

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