

## **STUDY ON ATTITUDE TOWARDS FOOD SUPPLEMENTS IN PATIENTS RECEIVING ENDOCRINE CONSULTATION**

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### **Abstract**

*The pharmaceutical market is invaded more intensely by products ranked in the category of food supplements. Annually, the National Institute of Food Bioresources registers over 1,500 new products. This avalanche of food supplements stimulate the interest of patients, often intending to substitute drugs with supplements. 25% of 143 patients consult at an endocrinology service have expressed this intention, motivated mainly by fear of hormones. Those who use food supplements must realize the real benefit of the supplements: they have a supportive effect, but do not replace standard treatment.*

**Key words:** supplement, patients, attitude, natural

### **INTRODUCTION**

Discussions about food supplements are becoming more frequent in recent years. The notion, relatively new for the Romanian legislation and the common language, was associated before either with special products for athletes, either with traditional tinctures and teas that promise to solve all health problems. (<https://secom.ro>)

In Romania, the first legislative act referring to food supplements appeared in 2000, issued by the Ministry of Health. In 2002, GEO 97/2002 was published and was approved with amendments by Law no. 57/2003 containing articles relating to food supplements. This GEO is still applying today. When Romania became an EU Member State, the EU Directive 46/2002 has transposed almost entirely into national law by Ministerial Order no. 1069/2007. (Garban G., Florescu N., 2013)

According to the Order of Health Ministry 1069/2007, food supplements are foods whose purpose is to supplement the normal diet and which are concentrated sources of nutrients or other substances with a nutritional or physiological effect, alone or in combination, marketed in dose form, such as: capsules, pastilles, tablets, pills and other similar forms, powder packets, liquid ampoules, bottles with a dropper and other similar types of liquid or powders intended for human consumption in small, measurable amounts.

The regulations concerning food supplements clearly differentiate such foodstuffs from the medicines, and expressly provide that the labeling,

presentation and advertising of food supplements must not attribute property of preventing, treating or curing a human disease, or refer to such properties. In order to ensure clear differentiation between these types of products, when filing the required notification form with the competent authority, the applicant must declare that the respective food supplement has not been authorized / registered in any country as OTC medicinal product.(Baciu A-M, Melinte A., 2010)

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The study includes a number of 143 patients from Bihor County, consulted between the 1<sup>st</sup> of June and 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2016, regarding endocrinology health problems (especially thyropathy). 97.2% of patients were women.

The aim of the study was to identify the frequency of usage for natural food supplements and the patients' attitude to these products vs. traditional treatment. For these aims, anamnesis and laboratory data were used.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

Thanks to the increasing promotional budgets of multinational vitamins and dietary supplements producers in Romania, and the dominance of these large companies locally, category sales were boosted in 2014. The increasing health awareness of the population and advice of specialists also helped interest in vitamins and dietary supplements to rise in Romania. In 2014, category sales rose by 12%, a growth level similar to that recorded in 2013. (<http://www.onlinebusinessbureau.com>)

In 2014 approximatively 17.6% of Romanians admit consuming a natural supplement (Garcia Alvarez A. et al, 2014).

In our study, conducted on 143 patients (139 females, 4 males) that were consulted by the endocrinology service, 62 (43.35%) patients admitted taking natural supplements. According to these patients, 26 (41.93%) patients were taking supplements daily, and the rest of them sporadically.

Based on anamnesis, the following types of supplements are used by the patients: Calcium and vitamin D, vitamin C, Zn, supplements for immunity, tablets for weight loss, memory or dyslipidemia, sleep disorders (fig. 1).

34 patients (82.92%) that took supplements for bones, immunity or insomnia claimed to feel better by using these supplements (facts related by some blood tests – e.g. calcemie). Not the same effect was registered among those who believed that natural supplements alone will help them improve their dyslipidemia or to lose weight (percentage of satisfaction: 14.28%).

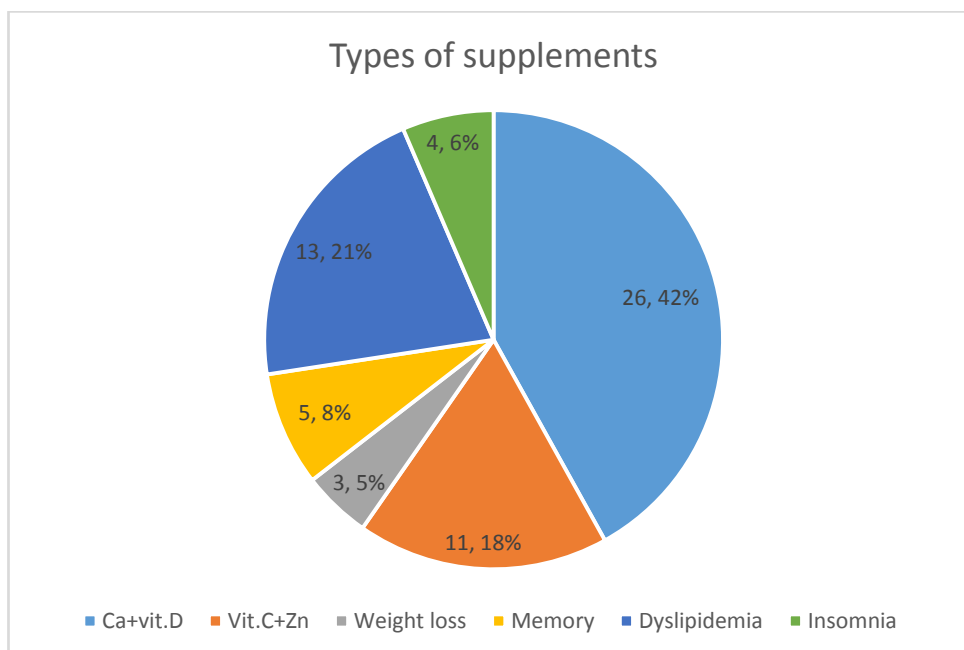


Fig. 1. Types and aims for food supplement intake

After consultation, especially when hormonal treatment was recommended, at least 25% of the patients (36 patients) asked for a “natural replacement”.

Most of the times people confuses terms like: natural, bio or ecologic, thinking that something that has “natural” written on the label, it comes from nature, is not polluted and does not harm the body... what is not entirely true. Also, they motivated their request by the fear of weight gain, change in mood or fear of entire body imbalance. A special category of patients seeking "natural treatments" are those who have multiple comorbidities and a large number of drugs included in the regimen. They are trying to reduce toxic cumulative effect of medicinal products through the use of supplements.

There are studies showing that people highly educated are usually consuming/ demanding natural supplements, e.g.:the use of folic acid was associated with a higher level of formal education (aOR, 5.2; 95% CI, 2.1-12.8), women with a higher education were more likely to use iron during pregnancy. Similar results were found when analyzing the contributing factors for the use of multivitamins: more than 12 years of schooling (Popa A.D. et al, 2013). In our study there was no significant difference between patients according to their level of education ( $p>0.1$ ) or their place of origin (urban or rural).

The most often prescribe supplement in our patients scheme of therapy was Selenium for patients with Hashimoto's thyroiditis. On the basis of the best available evidence, Se supplementation is associated with a significant decrease in TPOab titers at 3 months and with improvement in mood and/or general well-being. (Konstantinos ToulisA. et al., 2010). This kind of results were registered in our practice for all our patients with chronic autoimmune thyroiditis after using selenium supplements.

## CONCLUSIONS:

There is a growing demand for natural food supplements related to the fact that publicity to these products are more intense and aggressive.

Natural supplements can bring a big improvement to patients' health when they are used wisely and they come as a support for the patient's treatment.

Patients must understand that supplement do not bring healing, they bring improvement; supplements do not replace active treatment, they support treatment.

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