



SUSANNAH LAWSON

is a nutritional therapist and author of *Optimum Nutrition Before, During and After Pregnancy* (Piatkus, £9.99). She practises in Hampshire (see www.susannah-lawson.co.uk).

SUPPLEMENT FOCUS CHROMIUM

It can help with weight loss, cholesterol and may even lift your mood, yet 90 per cent of diets don't include enough. Here's how to top up your levels

What is it?

Chromium occurs naturally in the soil where it's absorbed by plants and grains. However, intake is thought to be low with few of us getting the recommended daily dose. Deficiency signs include feeling dizzy or irritable without frequent meals, cold hands and feet, fatigue and craving sweet foods. Research found levels to be especially low in diabetics and those with cardiovascular conditions.

How can it help me?

- **Reduce insulin resistance** - chromium can help enhance the body's insulin sensitivity. According to a scientific review in *The Diabetes Educator*, this response can help improve blood sugar control in those people suffering from metabolic syndrome, which is found to often be a precursor to diabetes and type 2 diabetes.
- **Assist in weight loss** - a long-term US study,

published in the *Journal of Complementary Medicine*, found that for obese men and women who weren't dieting, the higher the dose of the chromium supplement taken, the lower the weight gain over a 10-year period. Compared to those not taking a chromium supplement, the study found that weight gain was only half as much for those who were taking it. Furthermore,

men taking 150mcg or more a day actually lost weight over the decade.

- **Lower cholesterol** - chromium can help to reduce 'bad' LDL cholesterol and increase 'good' HDL cholesterol. A US study reported that total levels of cholesterol and LDL cholesterol 'decreased significantly' in individuals taking 200mcg of chromium daily for 42 days.

How much do I need?

There is no UK recommended daily intake for chromium, but in the US, it's 25mcg per day for women and 35mcg for men. To help a specific condition, however, the dose can be increased to 200mcg one to three times a day*. But consult your doctor first if you are taking any medication, especially for diabetes. It's also best to consult a nutritional therapist if you plan to take more than 200mcg for longer than a few months.

How do I use it?

Chromium levels in food vary dramatically but tend to be richest in brewer's yeast, wholemeal and rye bread, wheatgerm, chicken, lamb, eggs and green peppers. You can also take a supplement - the most absorbable form is chromium picolinate. Some formulas combine chromium with vitamin B3 (often called Glucose Tolerance Factor), which is believed to enhance its blood sugar balancing actions.

The new happy pill?

When Professor Malcolm McLeod from the University of North Carolina observed a patient recover from years of severe depression in just a few weeks, he discovered that his patient had taken a weight-loss supplement and when he experimented with the ingredients, he discovered that chromium was responsible for the rapid improvement. More studies have backed chromium's effect on mood so watch this space. ●