

lifts in his shoes to make him appear taller

Life & Style

# VITAMIN-AHOLICS



Picture: DAN GOLDSMITH Stylist: LIZ HEMMINGS Hair and make-up: SOPHIE OLIVER

been taking her combination of vitamins only since she started university last September.

'I used to work full-time in an office and had a routine which meant I could eat proper meals,' says Ellie, who lives with two housemates and her partner Ruben, 30, who works in a restaurant.

'But since starting my nursing course, time and a student budget mean I often skip meals.

'I'm forever dashing from university to my bar job, so my meals are being replaced with sugary snacks and drinks to keep up my energy levels.

'And while I've been trying to get more fruit, veg and protein into my diet, I kept a food diary and I was shocked; my diet is pretty rubbish. But that's why I've been taking supplements.

'I take a multi-vitamin which has iron in it because I don't eat much meat. I also take BetterYou vitamin D because I've always suffered from low moods in the winter [vitamin D is produced naturally by exposure to sunlight and can lift your mood] and, as I'm a student nurse, I spend a lot of time in hospitals where there's not much natural light.

'I'm forever washing my hands in the wards so my nails suffer, which is why I have a skin, hair and nails supplement, and I also take the coenzyme Q10 for general health.'

**S**HE adds: 'I take cod liver oil because I think it's good for my joints (I like running — I've done two marathons), and as I don't eat much fish, I think this helps, too.

'I'm 5ft 8in, 10st and a size 10 so I'm not overweight, but one thing I have noticed is that the supplements don't help me with my energy levels.' In the Mail's own experiment, we asked Zoe Harcombe to monitor the diets of Lauren, Julia and Ellie for a week. Nutritionist Zoe was shocked by what she found.

'Lauren says she's not sure why she takes the vitamins, but she would be suffering from malnutrition if she didn't,' says Zoe. 'Her diet is lacking in calcium, magnesium, iron and zinc, plus the fat soluble vitamins, A, D E and K. I'd also be surprised if she's getting enough of the "mood, energy and nerve" B vitamins.

'I'm staggered that Julia can put so much effort into supplements and so little effort into what she eats — especially when she says she knows she should be eating nutrients in food, not tablets.

'Meanwhile, Ellie may not be overweight, but she's not getting the vitamins and minerals that she needs from food. Some glimpses of great foods — fresh fish, eggs, mussels, mixed leaves — show that Ellie can eat well.

'The average Brit consumes 400 calories a day of sugar and more than 700 a day of flour — it's easy to see how, when you look at Ellie's diet — sugary cereals, processed breads, confectionery, biscuits and cakes.

'It's these 1,100-plus "empty calories" that have made the UK a country of overweight and undernourished people. If only these pill-poppers spent their time and money on decent food, they would be so much healthier and happier.

'If vitamins and mineral supplements hadn't been invented, we would have to eat a lot better than we do.'

sense of security and are over-indulging in the wrong kinds of food.

More than ten million Britons take vitamins regularly and the industry was worth £396million in 2009.

According to a survey by website [vivastreet.co.uk](http://vivastreet.co.uk), 80 per cent of women take vitamins daily, with 17 per cent gobbling up to six tablets a day.

Worryingly, one in five believes that taking vitamins means that they don't have to worry about a healthy diet.

'It's incredible that so many people seem to have forgotten why we eat,' says nutrition expert Zoe Harcombe.

'No tablets can replace quality meat, fish, eggs, dairy and vegetables in the diet.

'Vitamins and minerals are called micro-nutrients and are just one part of the equation. Macro-nutrients (proteins, fats and carbs) are also vital, and many people are not getting these essential nutrients in their diet, which means their long-term health could be affected.'

Julia Mowbray, 27, an events organiser from Shepherd's Bush, West London, is one such 'vitaholic'. At 5ft 9in tall and weighing around 10st, she is slim, but

**Supplement junkies:** (from left) Ellie, Lauren and Julia

**Healthy income**  
THE vitamin and supplement business is worth £13.5 billion worldwide

admits she is unfit and supplements her diet with around ten pills a day.

'I don't have the best diet in the world. My job is hectic and I rarely have time to make a meal from scratch, so I try to plug the gap with supplements,' she says. 'I'm always reading about how different vitamins can help you and I'm a bit of a sucker for it.

'I spend around £40 a month, so almost £500 a year, on vitamins. But I think they make a real difference.

'Three years ago I had a blood test that showed my levels of vitamin D were low. I kept getting tonsillitis and colds. Since I started taking vitamin D drops, I've hardly had even a sore throat.

'I also take a multi-vitamin for general health, selenium for my hair, cod liver oil for my joints, vitamin B complex for nerves, a skin, hair and nails supplement, a probiotic supplement, valerian for when my brain is whirring to help me sleep in the evening and sometimes an energy supplement.

'I've suffered from terrible PMS and cystitis since I started my periods when I was 16, and started taking the herbal pill Cyclopret a few months ago. I know that I should get my nutrients from my

food, but I'm not a confident cook, especially with things like fish.'

The most recent research on vitamin habits was carried out at the National Sun Yat-Sen University in Taiwan. One group of volunteers was told to take a multivitamin and a second group told to take a dummy pill, while their lifestyle choices were monitored.

In reality, both groups had been given placebos, but the researchers found that most who believed they had taken the supplement were more likely to choose an unhealthy meal over a healthy one.

But experts say that several British studies had come to the opposite conclusion.

Dr Carrie Ruxton, of the industry-funded Health Supplements Information Service, says: 'One of the big bugbears is that people who could do with taking vitamins and minerals are a bit reluctant to do so for some reason, whereas the ones who are doing relatively well with their diets are the ones who add vitamins and minerals on top.'

Ellie Harris, 31, a student nurse from Earlsfield, South-West London, says she has



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by Julia Stringer

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