

Niacin Flushing: A Helpful, Non-Harmful, Reaction in Improving Health

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Niacin flush is an infrequent response to niacin that is completely harmless and easily explained. One of niacin's important benefits is its ability to dilate blood vessels and thereby increase blood flow to various organs of the body. Superficially, the increased blood flow may sometimes result in a blush of the skin and a sense of warmth. This flushing feeling can be accompanied by an itching and tingling of the skin. Realize, however, that most people will not get this flushing sensation. When it does occur, the niacin flush usually begins within minutes of ingestion and lasts just a few moments. Others may notice it with the initial exposure but quickly become desensitized after continued use of the niacin-containing product.

If you have experienced a niacin flush, don't assume that you cannot take the products. On the contrary, physicians have known for years that, with a few modifications and some patience, nearly anyone can consume substantial amounts of niacin without it reacting adversely. Niacin has been used medically for many years to control high serum cholesterol levels. In fact, it remains today one of the most effective, safe and inexpensive compounds used to reduce total cholesterol. Niacin improves the entire lipid profile: it lowers LDL ("bad cholesterol"), raises HDL ("good cholesterol") and lowers triglycerides. However, it must be given in extremely high doses to achieve this effect.

To combat the flushing that sometimes occurs, doctors recommend the following: start out at lower doses and gradually increase over time; take with food and avoid consuming with warm beverages. If a reaction develops, then drink lots of water and relax. It will pass shortly. So why include niacin in our products? Quite simply, their effectiveness is enhanced greatly by niacin. In fact, niacin is an essential vitamin that allows hundreds of critical chemical reactions to take place in our bodies.

Already we have discussed its ability to vasodilate arteries and improve the entire lipid profile. Yet, the vast majority of niacin's effects deal with the metabolic conversion of food to energy. Niacin, or nicotinic acid, is one of two compounds that are categorized as Vitamin B3. The other is niacinamide, or nicotinamide. The two differ only slightly in chemical structure, but this change accounts for some profound differences physiologically. Niacin, for instance, is quickly absorbed in the intestine and enters the blood stream within minutes. Niacinamide is absorbed much more slowly and is later converted to niacin by the body. Niacin is also far more potent as a vasodilator. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that niacin is far more likely to produce a flush than niacinamide.

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