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**PUBLICATION TO HIGHLIGHT POOR NUTRITIONAL STATUS OF WOMEN
IN THE U.S. AND ABROAD**

**Columbia University Symposium Focuses On Essential Vitamins and Minerals for
Individuals and Populations**

May 9, 2005 – (New York, NY) Both in the United States and globally, low micronutrient status results in poor health at every stage of a woman's life and raises serious public health concerns. The effects of sub-optimal intake are particularly serious in women of childbearing age, where the woman's status affects not only her own health, but that of the next generation. In the U.S, approximately half of all women get less than the recommended daily allowance (RDA) for folate and approximately 75% of women get less than the RDA for calcium, magnesium, iron, zinc, and other micronutrients. The consequences of micronutrient deficiencies range from birth defects and anemia to high incidences of bone fractures and neurological impairments. These and other important findings from an international symposium organized by Columbia University's Institute of Human Nutrition will be the subject of an entire supplement of the May 2005 issue of the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition (AJCN)*; a leading medical journal on nutrition and health.

The June 2004 symposium entitled *Women and Micronutrients: Addressing the Gap Throughout the Life-cycle* convened 200 physicians, nutritionists, nurses, and public health professionals to address the effect of low micronutrient intake on a wide range of women's health issues including pregnancy, bone development, neurological functioning, immune response, menopause, and weight loss. The symposium and upcoming journal supplement were made possible by an educational grant from Wyeth Consumer Healthcare and present significant data on the adverse impacts of the micronutrient deficiencies in women of all ages, as well as strategies to improve women's health.

Beyond the alarming costs associated with micronutrient deficiency for individual women, there are profound economic consequences for communities worldwide. According to World Bank reports, the global economic burden of micronutrient deficiencies is approximately 5% of the gross national product (GNP) in many countries. Interventions to improve micronutrient status via supplementation or a nutrient-dense diet would cost only 0.3% of GNP.

The supplement's authors acknowledge the best way to combat micronutrient deficiency is through healthy diets composed of highly nutrient-dense food. However, that is not enough. They recognize the enormous logistical problems associated with distribution of nutrient-dense foods nationally and internationally and the difficulties many women face in affording, preparing, and consuming nutrient-dense foods in the appropriate quantities. In light of these challenges, they recommend that in parallel with efforts to provide nutrient-dense foods, food fortification and

micronutrient supplements like a daily multivitamin are important ways to provide essential vitamins and minerals to individual women and diverse populations.

The importance of the statistics and recommendations presented at the symposium prompted the *AJCN* to publish the proceedings as a special supplement that will be distributed to doctors, researchers and other health practitioners worldwide. The supplement addresses the personal, social and economic importance of micronutrients throughout the lifecycle, from childhood and adolescence, to pregnancy and aging. One chapter deals with menopause, micronutrients and hormone therapy. A final chapter addresses an underappreciated challenge in determining the micronutrient requirements of women who are on weight loss regimens and simultaneously engage in exercise training regimens.

The *AJCN* is published monthly by the American Society for Clinical Nutrition (Bethesda, MD) and provides authoritative information on clinical nutrition and its role in maintaining health and preventing and treating disease. Periodically, the *AJCN* publishes supplements on proceedings from internationally recognized conferences on clinical nutrition. For information about the American Society for Clinical Nutrition or the supplement, contact Sandra Schlicker, Executive Officer (sschlick@ascn.faseb.org). The supplement can also be ordered online at www.ajcn.org.

For more information about the Columbia University Institute of Human Nutrition's graduate programs in nutrition and continuing medical education (CME) courses for physicians, contact Dr. Sharon Akabas at (212) 305-4808 (sa109@columbia.edu) or visit the website at <http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/dept/ihn>.

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