

As winter arrives, Vitamin C tabs vanish

Risha Chitlangia & Rupali Mukherjee | TNN

New Delhi: If vitamin C supplements are your staple every winter, you may have to consider switching to natural alternatives like amla this year. Reason: There is an acute shortage of vitamin C in the country because a mix of economic and price-control factors has made production of the vitamin unviable for pharmaceutical companies.

Stocks of popular vitamin C tablets like Celin, Suckcee, Chewcee and Limcee are fast depleting. "There has been no supply for the past 2-3 months. Though the demand for the supplement has almost doubled with the onset of winter, there is no fresh stock available," said R K Bhatia, president of All Delhi Chemist Association.

The reason for the disappearance of vitamin C is said to be the sudden increase in the cost of its raw material, which is imported from China, clubbed with the government's decision to slash

HOW TO GET IT THE NATURAL WAY

Amla	Kiwi fruit	Tomato
Lemon	Broccoli	Carrot
Black-currant	Green veggies	Fresh milk & milk products
Orange	Grapes	

Daily dosage 45-60 milligrams of Vitamin C according to WHO

down its retail price to make it affordable. Industry experts blame the government for not revising the prices of vitamin C drugs in keeping with the rise in input costs.

► 60% of raw materials imported, P 6

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New Delhi: Shortage of vitamin C supplements this winter means doctors will be prescribing natural alternatives. Vitamin C is given as one of the main drugs for common cold, allergies, and respiratory disorders.

"We had warned the government that a situation like this would arise soon and they should revise the prices of vitamin C. Nearly 60% of the raw material used in manufacturing the vitamin is imported. It is impossible for indigenous manufacturers to produce vitamin C and sell it at prices laid down by the government," said D G Shah, secretary general, Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance.

"It is possible to get it from natural sources like amla and lemon but in case of those who are suffering from vitamin C deficiency, it is very important that there is no discontinuation of dosage," said Dr

Sanjeev Bagai, director and head of the department of paediatrics, Rockland Hospital. Vitamin C deficiency can lead to scurvy in which there is lack of synthesis of collagen in the human body. It often results in bleeding disorders, malformation of bones and growth retardation.

It is not just chemist shops that

VITAMIN C SHORTAGE

have running out of vitamin C stock, the government sector too is banking on the last stock procured a few months ago. "At present, we have stock for vitamin C, which is supplied to Delhi government dispensaries. This can last for a month or two, but by then we will get the new stock," said Zille Devi, director health services, Delhi government.

Doctors say vitamin C is commonly given to prevent allergic reaction and respiratory disorders. "A lot of research has been done which

shows that vitamin C plays an important role in preventing and treating respiratory disorders. It is an antioxidant and helps cell membrane of vital organs from getting damaged due to oxidation. Though the real mechanism is yet to be established, it is found to be very effective in treating respiratory disorders," said Dr Ashutosh Shukla, head of the department medicine, Artemis Healthcare Institute.

In the last two years, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority, has slashed the price of vitamin C twice following reduction in customs duty. "We are trying to work out a way to make vitamin C available in the market at the earliest," said A K Banerjee, chairman, APPA. Pharma companies say they have been forced to curtail production by over 70% as the hike in the raw material price cannot be passed on to the consumer since vitamin C prices are controlled by the government.