

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

July 29, 2018

“Multivitamins Do Not Prevent Heart Disease or Strokes”

Currently, 53% of the population now takes a daily dietary supplement and, of these, multivitamins are the most widely used product of this \$26 billion industry. About 31% of Americans use multivitamin and mineral supplements, according to 2011-2012 data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey. Still, most experts seriously doubt the "claimed benefits" of these supplements and they have found the harmful potential of many of them, including multivitamins. Cases in point, new studies have linked heavy multivitamin use to fatal prostate cancer, increased breast tissue density (associated with breast cancer), and increased allergies and asthma in children. Cancer experts say multivitamins are far less effective than a good diet, exercise and not smoking, each of which can lower cancer risk by 20% to 30%. A new 2018 study, published in *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*, states that taking multivitamin and mineral supplements doesn't prevent heart attacks, strokes, or cardiovascular death. Experts reviewed results from 18 prospective cohort studies and randomized controlled trials, which involved a total of more than 2 million participants with an average of 12 years of follow-up. They found that multivitamin and mineral supplementation wasn't associated with mortality due to cardiovascular disease (CVD), coronary heart disease (CHD), or stroke, nor with incidence of stroke. The authors said, "Our study supports present guidelines that recommend against the routine use of multivitamin/mineral supplements to promote cardiovascular health." Further they said, "Although multivitamin and mineral supplements taken in moderation rarely cause direct harm, we urge people to protect their heart health by understanding their individual risk for heart disease and stroke and working with a health-care provider to create a plan that uses proven measures to reduce risk. These include a heart-healthy diet, exercise, tobacco cessation, controlling blood pressure and unhealthy cholesterol levels, and when needed, medical treatment." An accompanying editorial said, "Often in biomedicine, practices are adopted because they appeal to our hopes and there is biological plausibility. In the case of multivitamins, it is logical that some vitamins may reduce cardiovascular events because they are anti-inflammatory or more broadly improve health and well-being. Yet, in this case, it appears they do not, and as such, multivitamins for cardiovascular disease joins the list of plausible but failed practices in cardiology." The antioxidant and vitamin craze over vitamins A and E and beta-carotene backfired when studies found increased health risk with those supplements, not less. All of the current advertising hype is about sales and profits. As Will Rogers said, "It's about spending money you don't have for something you don't need."

In the America that I love, many doctors no longer recommend multivitamins or antioxidants. Please get your vitamins from fresh foods and vegetables, not supplements.

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