

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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

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“Antioxidant Negative Studies Keep Coming”

Despite a lack of proven benefit and an association with harm in some studies, the obsession with vitamins and dietary supplements continues to fuel a multi-billion-dollar industry. In the United States alone, the supplement market was almost \$30 billion in 2015. The global dietary supplement market is projected to reach \$278 billion by 2024. Yet, a review paper titled "Supplemental Vitamins and Minerals for CVD Prevention and Treatment" found no benefit for supplementation with multivitamin, vitamins C and D, calcium, β -carotene, or selenium. Furthermore, some antioxidant combinations (at least two of vitamins A, C, and E; β -carotene; selenium; and zinc) and extended-release niacin were associated with an increase in all-cause mortality. A more recent meta-analysis in *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes* concluded that multivitamins do not prevent cardiovascular disease (CVD). Similarly, a *JAMA* publication found no benefit of omega-3 fatty acid supplementation on CVD risk, yet Americans continue to love their fish oil pills. Overall, there is no evidence from randomized controlled trials that any specific diets or dietary supplements prevent or treat cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's disease, dementia or strokes. Evidence gathered over the past few years shows that, at best, antioxidant supplements do little or nothing to benefit our health. At worst, large doses have been shown to have the opposite effect, promoting the very problems they were supposed to stamp out. Many are now saying that patients are filling their toilets with very expensive urine and placing their faith in worthless and sometimes dangerous promises in a bottle. According to late-breaking results from the ASCEND trial, fish oil supplements do not prevent heart attacks or strokes in patients with diabetes. This is a disappointing finding, but it is in line with previous randomized trials in other types of patients at increased risk of cardiovascular events, which also showed no benefit of fish oil supplements. There is no justification for recommending fish oil supplements to protect against heart attacks and cardiovascular events. Additional new studies have found that consuming lots of antioxidants through foods or supplements may not reduce muscle soreness after exercise. Experts say that people should probably avoid taking antioxidants for recovery. They also question the use of certain other strategies that athletes use following exercise to improve recovery, such as ice baths, massage, ensuring adequate macronutrients (carbohydrate and protein) intake during and following exercise. My research has revealed that in over 500 scientific studies, antioxidants have proven to be ineffective and frequently harmful (please check out my book on amazon.com entitled “Antioxidant Suicide: Excessive Antioxidant Intake Linked to Increased Mortality”).

In the America that I love, incorrect assumptions regarding the benefits of antioxidant supplements are going uncorrected while folklore and hype continue to flourish.

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