



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
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"Supplements Fail Again"

In 2008, a huge review of 67 studies, with over 230,000 participants, showed that antioxidant vitamin supplements taken by millions do not increase life expectancy and may raise the risk of a premature death. In fact, vitamin A was linked to a 16% increased risk of dying, beta-carotene to a 7% increased risk and vitamin E to a 4% increased risk. So, forget about taking these vitamins as "anti-aging" miracles. The evidence with vitamin C suggested that it was no better than a dummy pill. We must base our conclusions on scientific evidence and not on testimonials or statements of those selling these products. The Cochrane data suggested that antioxidant supplements are either useless or harmful. That should be the end of the story, but world citizens continue to gulp down these scam pills faster than a bass can suck-up minnows. The supplement industry and marketers of health foods would have you believe that antioxidants are the panacea of modern times but vitamin C, if injected intravenously, has a "prooxidant" alter ego that can benefit arteries or fight cancer, because it reacts with oxygen to generate hydrogen peroxide. In contrast, vitamin C taken orally has been found to be primarily ineffective at preventing cardiovascular disease, because it is quickly filtered out by the kidneys. As of December 2010, the FDA is expanding its reach to crack down on supplements used for weight loss, body building and sexual enhancement. They believe that manufacturers are deceptively labeling products and hiding harmful ingredient contents. FDA Commissioner Margaret Hamburg said, "The manufacturers selling these tainted products are operating outside the law. These tainted products can cause serious adverse effects, including strokes, organ failure and death." Dietary supplements have gotten away with these shenanigans for decades because, unlike drugs, they do not have to be approved by the FDA before they are marketed. In other words, manufacturers are responsible for the safety of their products and can keep selling them until they have been proven to be harmful. So, line up the guinea pigs, folks. Since 2007, because of links to strokes, kidney failure, liver injury and death, the FDA has "pressured" companies to recall nearly 200 "inappropriately-formulated" products, including 80 body building supplements. Actually, the FDA does not have the power to "force" recalls and instead it issues warning letters to draw attention of illegal products.

In the America that I love, we are aware that dozens of weight loss products containing sibutramine have been withdrawn from the market for causing increased risk of heart attack and strokes. Even body builders and athletes frequently do not research the potentially dangerous products they take every day. Folks, do you homework and do not be a victim.

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