

Vitamins are no damn good. Is it true?

Description

Gentle Reader,

Even on the beach in Nuevo Vallarta, news filtered down that, once again, some gurus warn us that *vitamins are no damn good*. How does that news make you feel? Like a fool for spending all that money on worthless pills? Here you have been trying to avoid the chronic diseases of life-style so many Americans develop in their late 50s and 60s, and you are told that multi you have been taking will not do the job. My vitamins should protect me from cancer, diabetes, heart disease, or else. Is it true? Absolutely. Otherwise why would I be taking all these pills?

Dr. Jamie McManus, medical director at Shaklee, asks us to take the 30,000 mile high view. Vitamins are meant to supplement a diet that does not provide optimal nutrition. They are not intended to substitute for a healthy diet rich in vegetables, lean protein and fresh fruit. Ninety-seven percent of us do not get adequate nutrition every day. Vitamin supplements help bridge that gap.

So what do these three studies in the [Annals of Internal Medicine](#) say about preventing chronic disease?

Perhaps we should begin by questioning the premise of the studies: that multivitamins can prevent chronic disease. Do you believe you take your vitamins for that express purpose and leave everything else to chance?

Dr. McManus says *“Prevention of any disease is a multi-factorial process that has to include diet, weight management, and lifestyle. To expect to see disease prevention accomplished by virtue of taking a daily multivitamin is a flawed premise. So, why are these large-scale (and very expensive) studies undertaken? It is simply the model of research that scientists and physicians understand – studying a single drug to determine what effect it may have on a single disease. Studying nutrition is far more complex.*

These studies were conducted the way scientists study specific drugs. Let us question that approach.

While a drug has a primary effect (usually something positive), they also have a myriad of side effects (which are usually negative and even life threatening). Every year pharmaceuticals are removed from the market because of these serious side effects. A study published in JAMA in 1998 showed that as many as 125,000 Americans die each year of properly prescribed pharmaceuticals – wow! When was the last time a vitamin was removed from the market?

Have you ever played around with stopping your vitamin intake for a week or so and then going back to them? Could you tell the difference in how you felt with and without the supplementary nutrition?

Vitamins and minerals all have multiple positive functional roles to play in our bodies – which is why so many Americans pop a multi each day. People simply feel better when they take a multi because they are filling in those all too common nutrition gaps.

All three of these studies showed that multivitamins have an excellent safety profile. Well, of course they do! The only “potential harm” that continues to be mentioned every time we have a study such as this published is the slight increased risk of lung cancer in smokers who took beta carotene. My response to that is – smokers: stop smoking!

Let me quickly summarize these studies. The largest one is another report from the Physician Health Study – previous publications of data from this large government funded study did show an association of reduced cancer associated with multivitamin usage.

The next study looked at cognitive decline in physicians – who are at the upper end of the intelligence scale and pretty well nourished. Showing a significant change in cognitive decline in this population is going to take some intervention beyond a multi – as this population is most likely doing lots of the right things to protect their brain function.

In other words, the presence or absence of a multivitamin can not be the deciding factor in declining brain function.

The third study tried to show that higher doses of specific vitamins decrease the likelihood of a second heart attack in folks who have already had a heart attack. Hmmm. Maybe we should look at weight reduction, cholesterol, blood pressure lowering, and blood sugar management as opposed to putting the burden of prevention of a second heart attack in someone with heart disease on vitamins!

I have been recommending a multivitamin (and beyond) to my patients, and consumers in general, for my entire 30 years as a physician – and nothing in these studies changes my mind. The statistics on inadequacies in our American diet are clear – most everyone is deficient in multiple nutrients. Here at Shaklee, we have the [Landmark Study](#), published in the journal Nutrition in 2007 that showed a nice correlation of better health with multiple supplement usage, starting with a multivitamin. We have over 100 published studies that validate the connection of nutrition and health. I urge you to continue taking your Shaklee supplements – but also, to remember the importance of eating healthfully, avoiding fast foods, and getting to a healthy weight on your journey to better health. [Dr Jamie McManus](#).

I couldn't agree more. The turnaround to Vitamins are no damn good could be vitamins are good. Another could be my vitamins are not supposed to prevent cancer, heart disease or diabetes. I prevent these diseases as best I can through my life-style choices. My vitamins help. I may develop these diseases anyway, no matter what I do to avoid them. What is more true for you?

I wish you good health and happy consumption of the healthiest diet you can muster in any given day, supplemented by the vitamins that fill in the gaps. I wish you success in finding your healthy weight, your top level of fitness, your most peaceful spiritual happiness, satisfying work and family relations. If you have questions about a supplement and diet program to help you achieve these prevention goals, I'd be honored to help. The New Year is upon us. A good time to begin.

Be well, Do well and Keep Moving.

Betsy

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