



November 6, 2010 – Grand Rapids, MI

## Multivitamins, Part 1

I frequently get questions about whatever health issue is in the news, but I've never gotten as many questions as I have on a recent article in *Prevention* magazine titled "Should You Kick the Multivitamin Habit?" written by Sarah Mahoney (1), so this is a good opportunity to address some of the issues raised in the article. I would like to say that this will address the multivitamin issue once and for all time but that would be wrong, because tomorrow or next month there will be new information that could change what we know.

I think questioning the prevailing thought is a good thing, but if you're going to do it, make sure the facts you use to support your position are accurate. That's my problem with the article.

While it's only about 20 paragraphs, there are two-sentence comments about studies that are 300 pages long. I like brevity as much as you do, but some things need to be explained. During the next four Saturday messages, I'll address statements made in the *Prevention* article. Why take that long? Reading a study that's 371 pages long takes time and if I'm going to comment on it, you can be sure I'm going to read it. I'm also contacting some of the scientists to see if they were quoted accurately.

My position is simple: I think we should all take a high-quality multivitamin every day because even if we eat a great diet, we just don't know what nutrients are and are not in the foods we eat; a little nutritional insurance is a good investment. That's my starting position, so let's see whether there's merit to the article or not.

### JAMA and Multivitamins

The opening paragraph in any article is usually designed to get your attention. That's exactly what the author does: "As recently as 2002, no less an authority than the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) recommended that 'all adults take one multivitamin daily'." That sounds really good, but there's one problem: it's not accurate. Neither the American Medical Association nor JAMA has a position paper or consensus statement that endorses the use of a multivitamin or any other dietary supplement. What is true is that in June of 2002, JAMA published two papers by the same authors who reviewed the nutritional science (1) and then recommended that physicians become familiar with their patients and recommend supplements based on the patients' needs (2). The AMA didn't recommend this; the authors did.

I've used those same articles myself to support the use of taking a multivitamin. But to say that the AMA or JAMA has ever recommended taking a multivitamin is not true. If an article starts with an inaccuracy, I immediately wonder what else is inaccurate. In this case, it turns out that there are plenty of inaccuracies.

### Unregulated Industry

One of the many things that irritate me is when a statement is continually repeated without any basis in fact. The author says, "It still shocks people that the FDA doesn't regulate supplements..." That's simply not true. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as well as the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) both have oversight over the supplement industry. The Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act of 1994 (DSHEA) established the laws that govern dietary supplements.

What is true is that they're different from the laws which govern both over-the-counter and prescription medications. Basically, DSHEA says that as long as a supplement manufacturer doesn't make claims that their

supplements cure disease, they don't have to test the product before it's introduced to the market place. That's why you'll read statements on the supplement labels such as "May benefit joint health" instead of "May help if you suffer from arthritis." Exaggerated claims will get you in trouble with the FTC big time. Recently, one manufacturer was marketing supplements they claimed would prevent type 1 and type 2 diabetes and cure type 2 if you had it, among other things. The FTC shut them down and fined them close to \$500,000. Does that sound like no regulation to you?

Mahoney goes on to talk about groups that certify supplements for purity and content. I think that would be meaningful only if every batch of every supplement were tested; that's why it's important to take supplements only from manufacturers that have a process in place to test every batch of their supplements. That's more meaningful because it means the company cares about every package it sells—not just the batch that's getting certified. She does state accurately that the FDA has established rules for companies to use called Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP). Then she goes on to say that the FDA is understaffed and doesn't enforce those GMPs. I guess that would surprise the companies whose facilities were shut down for unsanitary conditions by the FDA. True, more enforcement of current law would be beneficial, but to imply that it never happens is just wrong. It's like the traffic police stopping only the worst speeders—you can usually get away with cheating a little bit. But you probably don't want to take a supplement made by a company who cheats just a little bit. That's why the quality and practices of the company are so important.

## The Bottom Line

These are two of the simpler issues raised by the *Prevention* article. Next week I'll start to talk about the studies Mahoney used to come to her conclusions. If you take a multivitamin or you're in the supplement business, you do not want to miss the next three Saturday messages, and as always you can feel free to pass this message along to anyone you think would be interested in the subject.

Until then, the next time you read or hear someone say that dietary supplements aren't safe because the industry isn't regulated, you know that they really don't understand the law.

What are you prepared to do today?™

## Dr. Chet

### References:

1. *Prevention*. November 2010: 52-59.
2. *JAMA*. 2002;287(23):3116-3126.
3. *JAMA*. 2002;287(23):3127-3129.

---

## **WGVU** FM 88.5/95.3 **npr** *Straight Talk on Health*

Hear Dr. Chet's take on the latest health news and research—listen to *Straight Talk on Health* at 7 p.m. Sunday in the Eastern Time Zone on WGVU-FM 88.5 or 95.3, or listen live via the Internet by going to [www.wgvu.org](http://www.wgvu.org) and clicking on "Listen Live" in the gray bar at the top.

---

The health information in this message is designed for educational purposes only. It's not a substitute for medical advice from your healthcare provider, and you should not use it to diagnose or treat a health problem or disease. It's designed to motivate you to work toward better health, and that includes seeing your healthcare professional regularly. If what you've read raises any questions or concerns about health problems or possible diseases, talk to your healthcare provider today.

Subscribe to the Message from Dr. Chet at [DrChet.com](http://DrChet.com) — © Chet Zelasko PhD LLC