



November 27, 2010 – Grand Rapids, MI

Multivitamins, Part 4

Today's message is the final part of my analysis of the *Prevention* magazine article titled "Should You Kick the Multivitamin Habit?" by Sarah Mahoney (1). The article was more sensational than sound as I've tried to show in the past three Saturday messages. Was there any merit to the article at all? I think there was, and that's what I'm going to cover in my final comments on the article.

What and Why

I've answered thousands of questions on supplementation from people all around the world. The most important question I ask them is this one: *What supplements are you taking and why?* If you don't have a solid answer to that question, you shouldn't be taking it.

When it comes to a multivitamin-multimineral, the reason is relatively simple: you take it to make up for the nutrients not found in the foods we eat. You should have that type of answer for every supplement you take; it doesn't have to be the answer that I'd give, but you should have some idea.

Here's another reason. Some vitamins are added to foods that you might typically eat; if you're also taking it in supplement form, there is the possibility that you may exceed the Tolerable Upper Limit (UL) set by the Institute of Medicine.

Folic acid is the best example. It's been added to grain products for over 10 years to reduce the risk of neural-tube birth defects. Recent research has shown that it seems to be working. But if you were to eat fortified cereal and breads every day, take a multivitamin with folic acid, and take another supplement with folic acid in it, you could surpass the UL which is set at 1,000 mcg/day. That doesn't mean it will be harmful, but it does raise the fact that all sources of vitamins contribute to the total. I don't believe it's a serious issue, but it is a valid one, so know what you're taking and why.

Take a Plant-Based Multivitamin

Dr. Neuhouser, the lead author of one of the papers cited in the study, makes this statement:

The vitamin C in a multivitamin is likely just not as effective as the vitamin C in a citrus fruit where it's also surrounded by fiber and flavonoids and carotenoids. All these nutrients working together are what really keep you healthy.

I'm not sure I agree that vitamin C by itself is not effective, but the rest of the statement is right on target. Dr. Neuhouser was talking about eating food, of course, and we all should eat as many vegetables and fruits as we can. But unintentionally, she supported taking a multivitamin-multimineral with whole-plant concentrates, which is the fruit or vegetable minus the water and the fiber but with all the phytonutrients. That's the single most important thing to look for when you take a multivitamin-multimineral or most vitamin or mineral supplements for that matter: it should contain whole-plant concentrates. In that way, the chemicals that are naturally found along with the vitamins and minerals will be there to help the vitamins and minerals do what they do to benefit your health. You'll pay a little more, but how much is your health worth? Generally it's better to take a lower quality supplement than none at all, but invest in your health by always buying the best you can.

The Bottom Line

I hope this series has helped you understand the arguments raised in that *Prevention* article. One key problem with the article's assumptions is that at the end of the day, the experts still haven't proven one important thing: that the foods that we eat actually have the nutrition they claim they have. Everyone says it, but no one proves it—but that's an article for another day. For now, you should supplement your diet with a high-quality multivitamin-multimineral that contains whole-plant concentrates. I do, and so does the rest of my family.

What are you prepared to do today?™

Dr. Chet

Reference: Prevention. November 2010: 52-59

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