

Women's Multivitamin Study: Predictable Results And A Waste Of Valuable Research Funds, Says Alliance For Natural Health

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The Alliance for Natural Health (ANH) claims today that the latest study which claims to show that multivitamin supplements don't prevent cancer or heart disease, is a waste of public money. These funds, says the ANH, could be much more usefully spent on aspects of preventative medicine where a positive result was more likely.

The study that has triggered this criticism is one published in the Archives of Internal Medicine on February 9, led by Dr Marian Neuhouser of the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle. The study followed, over an 8-year period, the progression of cancer and heart disease in 161,808 postmenopausal women who were part of the US government funded Women's Health initiative. Of these women, no difference in disease outcome was found between the 42% of women, aged between 50 and 79, who took multivitamin and mineral supplements and those who did not.

But the ANH slammed the research. Dr Damien Downing, the ANH's medical director, a medical doctor who has practiced nutritional medicine for 25 years, called the research "childish naïveté". He also said the findings could not be applied to the general public because the study involved only less than healthy, overweight postmenopausal women taking trivial amounts of multivitamins and minerals with no data on their earlier lives when disease causation would have been initiated.

Dr Robert Verkerk, executive and scientific director of the ANH, said, "Like so many of the large studies conducted to evaluate the effects of supplements, any good scientist could have predicted the result. How much more public money needs to be wasted, or do we really have a health care system where so few scientists and doctors close to the big money know anything about preventative medicine?"

The ANH has today published a critique of the observational study on its website. Its criticism focused particularly on the lack of relevance of the study group to the general population, the doses of supplements used, the frequency of intake, the forms of nutrients taken, and the course of the diseases studied in relation to the time and duration of supplementation.

Dr Verkerk went on to say, "We were astonished to find that, with no reasons given, the study specifically excluded multivitamin and mineral supplements that exceeded the US RDAs which are known to be far too low to yield useful heart disease and cancer protective effects. Also any multivitamin with less than 10 nutrients was excluded from the 'stress supplements' group, and this would have included some of the highest dose, limited combination products which would have been most effective."

In its critique, the ANH argues that given that chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease have long development times and are often triggered by events in earlier life, evaluating the effects of low dose supplements in older women is a futile exercise. Many of the women would likely have been in a pre-clinical disease phase, so evaluating the effects of low dose supplements in later life while knowing virtually nothing about their lifestyle and nutrient intakes during their younger years is a classic case of "too little, too late."

The ANH represents a large and growing number of medical practitioners of nutritional medicine around the world. In the wake of yet another trial that it says was 'designed to fail', it is using this opportunity to offer to governments expertise from doctors and scientists associated with it so that they may assist in designing trials using specific diets and nutritional supplements that would have a far greater chance of success than those evaluated in the present Women's Multivitamin Study.

About the Alliance for Natural Health

The Alliance for Natural Health (ANH) is an international, non-governmental organisation, based in the UK. It was founded in 2002, and works on behalf of consumers, medical doctors, complementary health practitioners and health-product suppliers to help promote natural and sustainable healthcare through the use of 'good science and good law'.

[Alliance for Natural Health](#)

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