

Vitamin and mineral supplements: Strike four

By ACSH Staff — December 17, 2013



We've said it before, many times, but the data are still coming

in to underline the fact that vitamin/mineral supplements are of no use in preventing chronic disease, and are sometimes harmful. Now, [two new studies](#) ^[1] and an editorial in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* again substantiate this message.

In one study, Dr. Gervasio A. Lamas from Mount Sinai Medical Center, Miami Beach, Florida and colleagues followed about 1700 patients aged 65 years on average who had had an MI (heart attack) at least 6 weeks before the start of the study. The participants were randomly assigned to take either a high dose vitamin/mineral supplement or a placebo pill daily, and were followed for 55 months on average. There was no difference between the two groups of patients with respect to time to death from any cause, another MI, stroke, heart revascularization procedure, or hospitalization for angina (chest pain).

The second study, led by Dr. Francine Grodstein and colleagues at Brigham and Women's Hospital, Harvard Medical School, Harvard School of Public Health, and Veterans Affairs Boston Healthcare System, examined the effectiveness of multivitamin supplementation in slowing or preventing cognitive decline in nearly 5,000 men in the Physicians Health Study. The cognitive function study began in 1998, and the participants were assigned at random to take either a multivitamin supplement or a placebo pill. The men were followed for 12 years, and their cognitive functions were assessed up to 4 times during that period. There were no differences between the men on the vitamin supplements and those on the placebo with respect to changes in cognitive function over the study period.

In a [hard-hitting editorial](#) ^[2] in the same issue, Dr. Eliseo Guallar, from the Bloomberg School of Public Health and colleagues reviewed these and other results. Their conclusion in their own words:

Evidence is sufficient to advise against routine supplementation, and we should translate null and negative findings into action. Most supplements do not prevent chronic disease or death, their use is not justified, and they should be avoided. This message is especially true for the general

population with no clear evidence of micronutrient deficiencies, who represent most supplement users in the United States. ACSH's Dr. Ruth Kava commented simply, We couldn't have said it better ourselves.

ACSH friend, Dr. David Seres, Director of Medical Nutrition at Columbia University Medical Center who has long been an outspoken opponent of supplements says, We have been cautioning the public about this for years. Now, once again, we have scientific confirmation of the potential for harm from indiscriminate dietary supplement use, and the need for repeal or significantly modify the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act. This law leaves anything brought to market as a supplement essentially unregulated, other than requiring the disclaimer that the claims have not been evaluated by the FDA with which we're all so familiar.

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[1] <http://annals.org/issue.aspx>

[2] <http://annals.org/article.aspx?articleid=1789253>