

# Supplemental bad news about supplements: Cancer risk?

By ACSH Staff — April 21, 2015



As if we needed another supplement story. Between New York s

Attorney General Eric Schneiderman s [crackdown](#) [1] on retailers that have been selling adulterated or mislabeled supplements, to the discovery of an illegal [amphetamine-like stimulant](#) [2] in a number of bodybuilding drugs, to Dr. Henry Miller s scathing letter to Columbia University asking them to remove Dr. Mehmet Oz from his faculty position (which was partly about Oz promoting alternative treatments, including supplements), we could have easily handled a day off from the topic.

No such luck.

A group from the University of Colorado Cancer Center, led by Dr. Tim Byers, conducted a study (meta-analysis), in which he looked at 12 clinical trials containing a total of 300,000 people over a 20 year period.

The results should have given pause to people who indiscriminately wolf down vitamins and minerals as if they were candy. Consumption of a number of these vitamins was associated with an increase in specific cancers, depending on which vitamin was consumed.

This should come as no surprise to any regular Dispatch reader. Our advisor, Dr. David Seres, *Director, Medical Nutrition, Associate Professor of Medicine in the Institute of Human Nutrition* has written many times on this subject. In an editorial on CNN.com Dr. Seres said, Vitamin E and selenium supplements have both been [proven](#) [3], in a well-designed randomized trial with more than 35,000 men, to cause statistically significant increases in the incidence of aggressive prostate cancer. The National Cancer Institute felt the results were concerning enough to post them on their [website](#) [4], with a strongly worded warning that men should not take these, despite the claims of supplement proponents who vehemently [deny the scientific data](#) [5], based on outlandish theories.

The Colorado study revealed a correlation between excess vitamin E (prostate cancer), selenium (skin cancers), beta-carotene (lung cancer), and folic acid, a/k/a/ vitamin B9 (colon cancer).

ACSH s Dr. Josh Bloom, who has written extensively on the supplement issue from both regulatory and scientific points of view, had this comment: It s a shame wrapped around another shame, when folks are duped into buying useless and often contaminated supplements for their

health or to support some function or other, and they wind up not only wasting their money but actually harming themselves to boot. I don't know what more can possibly be said about these products that might dissuade consumers from using them. I do know that the manufacturers, protected as they are by that horrendous 1994 supplement law, are laughing all the way to the bank.

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[1] <http://www.ag.ny.gov/press-release/ag-schneiderman-announces-agreement-gnc-implement-landmark-reforms-herbal-supplements>

[2] [http://www.science20.com/pfired\\_but\\_still\\_kicking/what\\_the\\_hell\\_is\\_gnc\\_selling\\_now-154680](http://www.science20.com/pfired_but_still_kicking/what_the_hell_is_gnc_selling_now-154680)

[3] <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21990298>

[4] <http://www.cancer.gov/newscenter/qa/2008/selectqa>

[5] <http://www.drsinatra.com/vitamin-e-is-not-a-cause-of-prostate-cancer>