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Vitamin supplements: Insurance policy or a risky fad?

The health news have been buzzing with headlines such as, "Vitamin use not recommended" and "Worried about vitamin safety?" Even the New York Times recently had this headline: "More evidence against vitamin use."

This grabs my attention because I have been taking multivitamins for many years with the notion that I have nothing to lose and a safety net as well. Like many of you, when I was a kid, my parents would force me to take my vitamins so I wouldn't get sick.

Two recent studies raised concern about the safety of vitamin supplements with a host of questions.

Should anyone be taking them? Which ones are most risky? A recent study of older women found a slightly higher risk of death among those taking dietary supplements – including multivitamins, folic acid, iron and copper – compared with women who did not, according to a report in The Archives of Internal Medicine.

"Although we cannot rule out the benefits of supplements, such as improved quality of life, our study raises a concern regarding their long-term safety," said the report's authors.

A separate study found that men taking high doses of vitamin E

(400 units a day) for five years had a slightly increased risk of prostate cancer, according to a latest report published in The Journal of the American Medical Association.

Vitamins have long had a "health halo." The industry calls them an insurance policy against bad eating. But our foods are increasingly pumped full of them already.

Even junk foods and drinks often are fortified with vitamins or nutrients to give them a healthier profile and to get us buy the product with less guilt and feeling healthy. We now see vitamins in just about anything we consume, including "vitamin" water, orange juice, cereals, milk, candy bars and even on some alcoholic beverages.

As many as one-third of Americans take vitamins and nearly half of people 50 and older take multivitamins, surveys suggest.

Yet there is no clear evidence that multivitamins lower the risk of cancer, heart disease or any other chronic health problems. No government agency recommends them "regardless of the quality of a person's diet," says a fact sheet from the federal Office of Dietary Supplements.

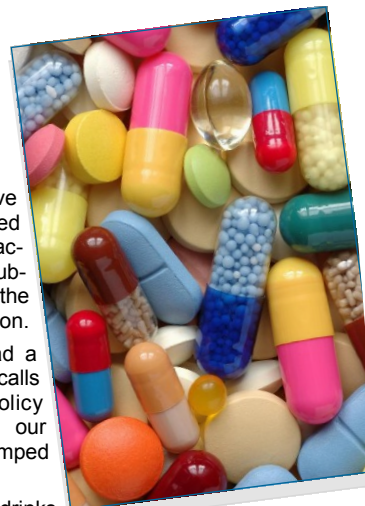
Some fads, such as the antioxidant craze over vitamins A and E and beta-carotene, backfired when studies found more health risks, not less. Correcting a deficiency to attain the right daily amount is different from supplementing beyond recommended levels.

The best way to get vitamins is to eat foods that naturally contain them, said Jody Engel, a nutritionist with the Office of Dietary Supplements.

"Foods provide more than just vitamins and minerals, such as fiber and other ingredients that may have positive health effects," she said. The findings are the latest in a series of research results showing that high doses of vitamins are not helpful in warding off disease.

Everyone needs vitamins, which are essential nutrients that the body can't produce on its own, but talk to your doctor when taking vitamin supplements, especially if you have health conditions, older or have a poor quality diet overall.

– Jon Ponce



WE AT BENCH Gym are serious about helping you with your healthy goals, but we also like to have our share of fun. We hope you enjoyed our unusual attire when we celebrated Halloween a bit early on October 27.

Top 3 tips for a healthy Thanksgiving:

- (3) **Drink Plenty of Water-** It's a dieter's best friend.
- (2) **Eat your favorite food:** Fill your plate with small portions of holiday favorites that only come around once a year instead of the precious calories on large portions of food you can eat everyday.
- (1) **Create a calorie deficit** by exercising to burn off extra calories before you ever indulge in your favorite foods.



BUZZ:

Did you know that the National Center for Creative Aging released the Brain Health Index, a ranking of American states measured for diet and nutrition, mental health, physical health and social well-being, and Maryland came away with top honors, followed by the District of Columbia?