

American Medical Association Acknowledges the Role of Vitamins for Chronic Disease Prevention in Adults

The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) recently reversed a long-standing anti-vitamin stance by publishing two scientific review articles recommending multivitamin supplements for all adults.

The significance of this change is reflected in the historically conservative position of the American Medical Association (AMA) and other respected health organizations that have been hesitant to routinely recommend vitamin supplements, except during pregnancy or to treat specific nutritional deficiencies.

Robert H. Fletcher, MD, MSc, and Kathleen M. Fairfield, MD, DrPH, of Harvard Medical School and the Harvard School of Public Health, reviewed more than 30 years of scientific papers regarding vitamins in relation to chronic diseases and published their findings in two companion articles.

In the scientific review article, the researchers wrote that the North American diet is generally sufficient to prevent overt vitamin deficiency diseases such as pellagra, scurvy, and beriberi. However, they explain, "recent evidence has shown that suboptimal levels of vitamins, even well above those causing deficiency syndromes, are associated with increased risk of chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, cancer and osteoporosis." In a clinical commentary, they note that "a large proportion of the general population" has less-than-optimal intakes of a number of vitamins, exposing them to increased disease risk. In addition, they counsel that, "it appears prudent for all adults to take vitamin supplements."

From the body of evidence they reviewed, they concluded the following:

- Folate and Vitamins B6 and B12 are required for homocysteine metabolism and are associated with decreased coronary heart disease risk.
- Folate may decrease the risk of neural tube defects and certain cancers such as colorectal and breast cancers.
- Vitamin E and lycopene may decrease the risk of prostate cancer.
- Vitamin D is associated with decreased occurrence of fractures when taken with calcium.

Fletcher and Fairfield advise using, "multivitamins, rather than individual vitamins, because multivitamins are simpler to take and cheaper than the individual vitamins taken separately and because a large proportion of the population needs supplements of more than one vitamin."

It is gratifying to see that finally the medical community is acknowledging the value of nutritional supplements for disease prevention. For a decade, USANA Health Sciences has been a leader in providing high quality nutritional supplements containing advanced levels of vitamins, minerals and other important nutrients associated with long-term health.

References

Fairfield KM, Fletcher RH. Vitamins for chronic disease prevention in adults: scientific review. JAMA 2002; 287:3116-3126.

Fletcher RH, Fairfield KM. Vitamins for chronic disease prevention in adults: clinical applications. JAMA 2002; 287:3127-3129.