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ANTIOXIDANTS TUTORIAL, PART 4: SAFETY

Nutritional supplements have been used and valued by American consumers ever since vitamins were first discovered and commercialized, beginning largely in the early decades of the 20th century.

Multivitamin/mineral supplements are an effective means of delivering adequate amounts of essential nutrients to help people achieve their recommended intakes. The great majority of dietary supplements, including multivitamins, are safe for regular use. Despite widespread usage, there have been no specific published reports of toxicity or adverse effects associated with the proper use of multivitamins.

A series of well-publicized clinical trials utilizing relatively high doses of single nutrients or combinations of nutrients (such as vitamin E and/or beta-carotene) in diseased patients have yielded disappointing results, and even suggested the presence of harm. However, those trials were conducted in patients with serious illnesses (such as cancer or cardiovascular disease), who were on multiple medications, or who were smokers. The results of these trials should be placed in their proper context, including the fact that they are not applicable to the generally healthy population.

Advanced levels of antioxidants are a common thread among nearly every population found to be less prone to chronic degenerative disease. As an example, the Japanese – often cited as an example of longevity – have high levels of fruit, vegetables, green tea and soy as part of their traditional diet. Vegetarians have lower levels of heart disease and cancer when compared to the typical mixed diet, in part due to their generally higher intake of antioxidants.

While high levels of single nutrients and foods may pose a risk of danger and toxicity, there is no known unsafe level of total antioxidants. As far as we can tell, as long as they are varied and balanced, the more antioxidants the better.