

Teens who take multivitamins have healthier lifestyles

December 4 2006

Teenagers who take a daily multivitamin supplement have a healthier diet and lifestyle than those who don't take vitamins, reports a study in the December Journal of the American Dietetic Association.

As part of the Child and Adolescent Trial for Cardiovascular Health (CATCH), the researchers analyzed data on height, weight, diet, and health behaviors for more than 2,500 U.S. high school seniors. Their goal was to discover whether teens who took vitamin supplements differed in terms of diet, exercise, and other health habits. The lead author was Lindsay Reaves of University of Minnesota School of Public Health.

Twenty-five percent of the teens reported taking a daily multivitamin supplement. Females were more likely to take vitamins than males, and whites more likely than minority members.

Vitamin use was related to some important differences in lifestyle behaviors, with vitamin users having healthier lifestyles. Adolescents who took vitamins had a lower rate of smoking, 29 vs 33 percent; and were less likely to be overweight, 31 vs 37 percent.

Teens who took vitamins were also more physically active, including higher rates of participation in team sports and other organized sports. Vitamin use was also linked to a lower rate of television watching—less than 60 percent of vitamin users watched an hour of TV per day, compared with 70 percent of nonusers. The differences remained

significant after statistical adjustment for other factors.

Taking vitamins was also associated with a healthier diet, as reflected by an overall "food index score." Adolescents who took vitamins actually consumed more calories, but got more of their calories from carbohydrates and protein and less from fats. Vitamin users ate more fiber; had more daily servings of whole grains, fruits and juices, and vegetables; and ate more fish. Although teens who took vitamins, had more desserts, they ate fewer fried foods and drank fewer soft drinks.

The American Dietetic Association recommends a diet including a wide variety of foods as the best strategy for optimal health and lower risk of chronic disease. Like adults, many adolescents take regular vitamin and mineral supplements. The new study is one of the first to look at the relationship between vitamin supplement use among teens and diet and lifestyle factors such as physical activity and overweight.

"Adolescents who use multiple vitamin supplements have healthier dietary and lifestyle behaviors than non-users," the researchers write. They remind dietitians to ask teens about vitamin use—what types of supplements they take, how often, and why. Teens with a healthier diet are more likely to take vitamins, and thus are probably at lower risk of having poor nutritional status.

However, "Supplements are not substitutes for healthy dietary patterns," the researchers conclude. "[A]dolescents should be encouraged to adopt such healthy patterns, rather than rely on dietary supplementation for adequate nutrient intake."

Source: Elsevier

Citation: Teens who take multivitamins have healthier lifestyles (2006, December 4) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2006-12-teens-multivitamins-healthier-lifestyles.html>

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