

Multivitamins are no magic bullet panacea

March 2 2009, By Jodi Mailander Farrell

We've been told for years that popping a multivitamin will make us healthier and prolong our lives, but a major study recently found that daily multivitamins don't make a difference in the rate of breast or colon cancer, heart attack, stroke, blood clots or mortality.

What you should know:

- Don't toss your pills - yet: The study, part of the government-funded Women's Health Initiative, is well-respected, but it was on 161,808 postmenopausal women and the follow-up time was about eight years. Critics say the results shouldn't be generalized to rest of the population and that eight years may not be enough time to see an effect. The study doesn't apply to pregnant women or people who take vitamins because they have a deficiency in, say, vitamin D or other important nutrients.
- Don't run out and buy them, either: The National Institutes for Health in 2006 concluded that evidence supporting the benefits and even the safety of multivitamin and mineral supplements is limited and inconclusive. Scientists suspect the benefits of a healthy diet come from eating whole fruits and vegetables, not the individual vitamins in them. They're beginning to study whether high doses of whole-food extracts can replicate the benefits.
- Bottom line: Health doesn't come in a pill. The lead researcher in this latest study says people should buy fruit and veggies, not multivitamins.
- Learn more: Keep an eye on The Stanford Nutrition Studies Program,

which has ongoing studies on the health benefits of everything from supplements like Omega-3 fatty acids and ginkgo biloba extract to soy milk and garlic, at nutrition.stanford.edu.

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Citation: Multivitamins are no magic bullet panacea (2009, March 2) retrieved 2 May 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-03-multivitamins-magic-bullet-panacea.html>

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