

Multivitamins

Benefits and risks

This handout explains the benefits and risks of taking multivitamins. It also includes the results of some scientific studies.

Should I take a multivitamin?

Taking a multivitamin can help some people. But, studies show that taking a multivitamin may be harmful for other people. Multivitamins are also linked with having a greater risk of cancer.

The 1994 Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act (DSHEA) ruled that multivitamins and other dietary supplements no longer need to be approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This means that vitamins you find in the store or online have not been checked by the FDA for quality, strength, or purity.

It is always best to meet your nutritional needs by eating a varied, plant-based diet with plenty of vitamin-rich fruits and vegetables.

Who should take multivitamins?

Taking a multivitamin may help some people. Those who benefit the most from taking a multivitamin are:

- Pregnant women
- People who eat less than 1,200 calories a day
- Strict vegetarians or vegans
- People with limited diets due to food preferences, allergies or intolerances, gastric bypass surgery, or chemotherapy

What do scientific studies show?

Results from scientific studies vary. Page 2 gives examples of some recent studies. The source for each study is included.



If possible, it is always best to meet your body's nutritional needs with plenty of vitamin-rich foods.

- Several studies have shown that vitamin D helps prevent cancer. Most people get their vitamin D from sunshine. If you live in the Pacific Northwest or do not get much direct sun on your skin for other reasons, taking a vitamin D supplement may be a good idea. (www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/complementaryandalternativemedicine/herbsvitaminsandminerals/vitamin-d)
- One study found that taking supplements may be somewhat helpful. A study published in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* in 2013 showed that taking multivitamins did not increase risk of death or heart disease and may provide a “modest protective benefit.”
- The 2014 US Preventative Task Force could not prove either benefit or risk from taking vitamins.
- Research from the National Institutes of Health – AARP Diet and Health Study showed that men who take multivitamins more than 7 times a week have a higher risk of advanced and fatal prostate cancer than men who never take multivitamins. This research was published in 2007 in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.
- In one study, Clinical Epidemiology Research and Training Unit researchers found that the intake of zinc from multivitamins was linked with a double risk of prostate cancer. This work was published in the journal *Cancer Causes & Control* in 2009.
- The Selenium and Vitamin E Cancer Prevention Trial (SELECT) at Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center showed that taking vitamin E and selenium supplements increased the risk of prostate cancer.
- The National Institutes of Health states that:
 - Only a few trials show that taking vitamins can help prevent disease.
 - It could be dangerous to take too many dietary supplements.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Prostate Cancer Prevention Clinic/Men’s Health Center:
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