

Health Letter

Fear of scientific innovation –

The agents of the Pharma cartel stir up anti-vitamin hysteria

It is always dangerous when science is manipulated in order to instigate fear amongst the public. A current example of this is the presentation of study data by the "Cochrane Collaboration" on the supposed risks of vitamins – no doubt, in this case to scare people away from taking nutrients that are essential for a healthy life, their safety and effectiveness have long since been convincingly demonstrated in numerous scientific studies.

The evaluation of 67 studies published in April 2008 is a so-called meta-analysis, i.e. a statistical evaluation of data taken from several studies. Therefore, this is not a new study, but a summary report which has been re-presented following publication a year ago in the medical journal "JAMA" (Journal of the American Medical Association) (2007, 297, 842-857).

In their current evaluation, the authors of the study – who are identical in both publications – conclude that certain antioxidants, i.e. vitamin A, E and betacarotene, supposedly increase the risk of mortality by up to 16 percent. This is a startling interpretation, given the fact that the original publication last year already attracted a great deal of criticism from other researchers and nutritionists – with the result that the same authors later admitted that their paper contained errors. Corrections were subsequently published in the same journal (JAMA 2008, 299, 765-766). Nevertheless, the same study has now been "massaged" again and published as "new".

Numerous errors and distortions

Below we discuss some of the scientific aspects and details of this distorted study, which have led to unfounded conclusions being drawn, and subsequently to panic-inducing headlines in the media:

- Out of 815 studies about vitamins, the authors selected 68 for their analysis in the first publication, and they selected 67 studies for the current review. It is interesting to note, that the authors failed to include any study in which no one died during or after the study period.
- The meta-analysis included 20 trials conducted on healthy subjects and 47 studies in which vitamins were taken by people suffering from a variety of diseases (such as Alzheimer's, heart disease and cancer). The analysis did not investigate in details the causes of death, which not only included people suffering from coronary disease, cancer and broken hips, but also accidents, suicides and other causes. It is likely that deaths occurred due to previously diagnosed diseases, not antioxidant supplementation. If a true risk of mortality was apparent in any of the trials with antioxidants, the study would have been stopped immediately. None, in fact, were stopped and such conclusions were not even indicated by the authors of the trials.

- The doses of supplements in different trials used for the analysis, and also the length of intake, were significantly different. In addition, in many of the studies included, the participants were taking not only tested nutrients but also a long list of other substances and pharmaceutical drugs. It is apparent that the underlying health problems, as well as various medical interventions, drugs and supplementation treatments could all interfere or mask the effects that the authors of the meta-analysis attributed to one or a selected combination of chosen nutrients.
- It is noticeable that only after dividing these 67 studies into groups of "high risk bias" and "low risk bias" did the authors observe a statistically significant effect on mortality. Otherwise, no such effect could be observed.

Scientific facts refute the "Cochrane Report"

At a conservative estimate, nearly 160 million people in North America and Europe have been using the supplements which were evaluated in this study for decades. If antioxidants were a significant public health risk, it would have been identified by now. In contrast, the health benefits of vitamins have a huge amount of supportive laboratory, animal and human observational and experimental data.

Even the authors of the "Cochrane Collaboration" admit that their findings are in conflict with studies which show benefits of antioxidant supplementation (Nutr Cancer, 2003, 46 15-22; J Natl Cancer Inst 2003, 95, 717-722; Dis Colon Rectum 1999, 42, 212-217). Unfortunately, despite this, the authors again repeated a flawed analysis. The data presented is clearly only useful to those who, for purely commercial reasons, want to safeguard the profitable marketing of pharmaceutical products by trying to suppress widespread use of vitamins and other natural substances.

What you can do now

- Find out in detail about the benefits of vitamins and other micronutrients for prevention and therapy of the major endemic diseases.
- Visit the Dr. Rath Research Institute website at www.drrathresearch.org, to get an overview of the numerous studies and publications in this field. Did you know that research work on the importance of vitamins and other nutrients has been awarded Nobel prizes on several occasions?
- Give your relatives and friends information about this subject and about the need to modernise our health system.
- Visit the Dr. Rath Health Alliance website to find out more about getting involved in promoting a better public health system.