

Don't pop supplements randomly



📷 Vitamins People shouldn't self-prescribe multivitamins , Thinkstock

Some of us are in the habit of taking vitamin supplements either because we don't consume a healthy diet of fresh fruits and vegetables or regularly end up skipping meals due to work schedules or simply because we want to enhance our overall health. Some people have been taking various supplements for years now. A recent study says concluded that taking vitamin supplements doesn't prevent cardiovascular problems. We asked experts for their take on the matter.

WHAT RESEARCH SAYS

Analysing information from 18 previously published studies, this new study examined the link between multivitamins and mineral supplements and the risk of certain cardiovascular problems, suggests that vitamin and mineral supplements do nothing to prevent heart disease. The researchers tracked over two million people in five countries for an average of 12 years, and concluded that multivitamins did not prevent heart attacks, strokes, or death from heart disease.

Study lead author Dr Joonseok Kim said, “It has been exceptionally difficult to convince people... to acknowledge that multivitamin and mineral supplements don’t prevent cardiovascular diseases.” He added, “I hope our study findings help decrease the hype around multivitamin and mineral supplements and encourage people to use proven methods to reduce their risk of cardiovascular diseases – such as eating more fruits and vegetables, exercising and avoiding tobacco.”

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN POPPING MULTIVITAMINS

So do our cardiology experts agree with the findings of the study? “It is very hard to convince people as for the last two to three decades they have been popping these pills. There is no data to support that having multivitamins will reduce your heart risk. In fact, some of the vitamins in excess can increase one’s risk of heart disease because they are extracted from various sources,” opines Dr Bipeenchandra Bhamre, cardiac surgeon, Sir Harkisandas Narrottumdas, Reliance Foundation Hospital, who asks his patients to eat fruits, green vegetables, carrots, etc, go out in the sun, as naturally available vitamins are better for our body rather than supplements. One must consult a doctor before starting over-the-counter multivitamin/ antioxidant pills.

THERE’S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR GOOD NUTRITION AND REGULAR EXERCISE

“Nutritional studies have established that fruits and vegetables are a good source of many vitamins and are associated with a lower risk of stroke and coronary heart disease. There is no substitute for good nutrition and regular exercise. This meta-analysis has clearly concluded that multivitamins are unnecessary and does not benefit in cardiovascular and stroke outcome,” explains Dr Santosh Kumar Dora, senior cardiologist, Asian Heart Institute.

Dr Nilesh Gautam, senior interventional cardiologist, Asian Heart Institute, too, agrees with the study, saying that lifestyle modifications in the form of regular 30 minutes of aerobic exercise a day, healthy diet, cessation of smoking, control of blood sugar and blood pressure are most important.

WHO SHOULD TAKE VITAMINS AND SUPPLEMENTS?

If despite consuming a healthy diet, levels of iron and vitamins in the blood are low and the patient is showing signs of deficiency, then only after a proper

physician's consultation, multivitamin and supplements should be started, cautions Dr Gautam. If a patient has blood loss or malabsorption syndrome or coming off a major surgery or not able to take oral diet then, these supplements should be added.

Some specific categories of patient may need vitamin supplements, says Dr Dora. A pregnant woman will need folic acid supplement for proper prenatal development. Vegans may lack Vitamin B12, an essential vitamin for nerves and blood cell formation. So they may need Vitamin B12 supplement if the level is low in blood. Vitamin D3 deficiency is common in population as many are not exposed to the sun because of their work schedules. If the levels are low, then Vitamin D3 supplement is needed. It helps in absorption of calcium and phosphorus from the intestine and helps in bone growth. People should not self-medicate.