

# Take Your Vitamins Like a Doctor

By Evan L. Lipkis MD

## Introduction

**Vitamins are greatly misunderstood because promotion of products gets in the way of the truth. You are entitled to know the evidenced based data surrounding a vitamin or herb. I will help you to navigate this maze.**

**Additionally vitamins and herbs are like drugs with specific side effects. Remember to tell your physician any vitamin or herb that you take so that he/she has your complete list of medicines and vitamins. It's a great idea to bring this list to your doc every time you see your physician.**

**I only list vitamins and herbs and a few household products that I feel have at least some beneficial value. Most supplements are not beneficial but these select few have merit.**

**I will rate each of these vitamins from 1-5 like Roger Ebert. 5 is my highest rating and 1 is my lowest rating. I will indicate the rating by using the @ sign. So @@@@ is the highest rating. You'll see the rating right after the vitamin. You can improve your health with just a few extra vitamins or some household products. Let me be your guide.**

**My favorite products are also listed on my website at [www.DrLipkis.com](http://www.DrLipkis.com) Make sure that you sign up on this site for my free monthly newsletter, Lifesavers which is guaranteed to save or enrich your life. It's an essential staple!**

### **Alcohol @@@**

There will always be controversy with this drug because it is potentially addicting. If addiction or a positive family history enters into play then skip it. Since 1979, there is a large consistent body of evidence that 1-2 drinks a day decreases heart disease possibly by increasing HDL or good cholesterol. It may also relax the blood vessels. Additionally, a JAMA (Journal of the American medical association) article even indicated that red wine may have an anti cancer effect.

In women however, 1 or more drinks daily markedly increases breast cancer. Women should have a few drinks a week or less. Finally there is some evidence that mild consumption of alcoholic beverages may reduce fasting blood sugar.

By the way 1 drink =2 beers=1 glass of wine=1 oz. of hard liquor. Most people understate the amount of alcohol consumed so the above data may help to define what one drink actually is.

### **Calcium @@@@**

Many studies show that adequate calcium intake can decrease the incidence of colon cancer and polyps. Calcium may help to prevent the loss of bone. Men and premenopausal women should take 1000 mg of calcium daily. Postmenopausal women should take 1500 mg daily. Often the calcium can be combined with Vitamin D, which is one of my favorite vitamins. Osteoporosis kills more people then breast, ovarian and uterine cancers combined so taking calcium is a good idea. The most popular brands are Oscal or Viactiv (calcium carbonate), Citrical (Calcium citrate which contains less calcium but it's easier on the stomach) and Posture (calcium phosphate).

### **Cinnamon @@@@**

This is no joke. A pinch of cinnamon taken three times a day at meals has a powerful triple-play effect. Do this for about a month and you can lower your sugar by 19%, your LDL (or bad) cholesterol by 17% and your triglycerides (fats) by 26%. I don't know of one prescription drug that can create this triple play.

I know what you're thinking. You're going to stop your cholesterol medications and take cinnamon. Don't do that! Don't stop exercising and eating healthy either. This is just a nice low cost way to achieve better health. And it's so simple. NOTE: If you are diabetic, monitor your blood sugar while taking cinnamon, since your sugar may drop. Have your doctor retest your sugar and cholesterol in a month while fasting (water is OK to take) 10 hours or more. A pinch of cinnamon three times a day with meals can safely reduce your sugar and cholesterol with very little cost. The studies do need to be duplicated but I see no harm in trying this simple intervention.

Please note that researchers have been using *Cinnamomum cassia*...the common type of cinnamon in U.S. grocery stores. Check your labels in the store and on any cinnamon capsules as you might as well duplicate the original study in yourself!

### **Creatine @@**

This supplement generates ATP or energy for the body and may result in less fat and more muscle. Perhaps supplementation will be helpful for bodybuilders or if you are training for a race. The recommended dosage is 5,000 mg (one tablespoon of powder in water or juice) daily. I am not in favor of most bodybuilding supplements because the cost is usually not worth the benefit. Additionally, side effects can be an issue. This statement also applies to Creatine. It appears to be safer than many other body building supplements.

I am not a big fan of other body building supplements especially the ones that contain growth hormone, growth hormone stimulants, androstenedione, testosterone derivatives etc. I am worried about side effects that range from liver damage to cancer.

### **Derma Q-Gel Cream @@@@**

This cream is marvelous for wrinkles. It has a unique delivery system that provides coenzyme, green tea and 20 other active ingredients to help your skin look youthful. It may help reduce the incidence of skin cancer as well.

A keloid is a buildup of thick-scar tissue due to the over production of collagen during wound healing. A keloid may be reduced by having your physician inject steroids into it. Aldara cream has been shown to help prevent the recurrence of keloids once it is excised.

### **Echinacea @@1/2**

This herb may be effective against colds and flu. It probably stimulates the immune system and can help reduce the severity of upper respiratory infections. Rare allergic reactions have been reported. Clinical trials have been mixed on this herb's efficacy. A big new study is bringing back the question of whether echinacea is useful for the common cold.

Previous studies suggest that echinacea is modestly effective for treating colds...but not for prevention.

Now a large trial says that echinacea isn't useful for treatment or prevention.

This otherwise well-designed study only tested echinacea *angustifolia*. Earlier studies used different varieties.

It's still too soon to say whether echinacea is useful for colds. It might be worth a try if started at the onset of a cold. But actual improvement is not likely to be huge.

### **Fish Oil @@@@**

I like to call this vitamin F. it is one of my all time favorites. Fish capsules don't contain mercury as opposed to the rare health issue of mercury in fish.

Consumption of the fish-oil component eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) lowers rates of unstable angina and nonfatal coronary events in patients with high cholesterol, researchers report in *Lancet*. In an open-label, industry-sponsored trial, researchers randomized some 19,000 Japanese patients with total cholesterol levels at 6.5 mmol/L (roughly 250 mg/dL) or greater to receive either 1800 mg of EPA a day plus a statin, or statin alone. Five-year cumulative rates of major coronary events were 2.8% in the EPA group and 3.5% in controls (relative risk reduction, 19%). Rates of sudden cardiac and coronary death did not differ between the groups.

So lots of fish oil and a cholesterol lowering statin agent reduced heart disease better than a statin alone in patients with heart disease.

An observational study finds an increased risk for adverse neurodevelopment in children whose mothers limit seafood consumption during pregnancy. It should be noted that this study was sponsored by the fisheries. Probably the safest thing to do is to eat fish once weekly.

Eating fish at least once a week is also good for the brain, slowing age-related mental decline by the equivalent of three to four years, a study suggests.

The research adds to the growing evidence that a fish-rich diet helps keep the mind sharp. Previous studies found that people who ate fish lowered their risk of Alzheimer's disease and stroke. Fish such as salmon and tuna that are rich in omega-3 fatty acids also have been shown to prevent heart disease and sudden death.

In a recent study, researchers measured how well 3,718 people did on simple tests, such as recalling details of a story. The participants, all Chicago residents 65 and older, took the tests three times over six years. They also filled out a questionnaire about what they ate that included 139 foods.

"We found that people who ate one fish meal a week had a 10% slower annual decline in thinking," said co-author Martha Clare Morris, an epidemiologist at Rush University Medical Center. "Those who ate two fish meals a week showed a 13% slower annual decline."

The American Heart Association recommends that most people eat fish at least twice a week to reduce the risk of heart disease. Eating fish at least once a week cuts sudden cardiac death by half.

They also recommend 1 g/day of fish oils (EPA plus DHA) from diet or supplements for patients who already have heart disease. This decreases the risk of future cardiac events by 15%. Most fish oil comes in 1 gram soft gels and contains varying amounts of omega 3s called DHA and EPA.

Higher doses of fish oils can lower triglycerides... 2 to 4 grams/day of DHA and EPA can lower very high triglycerides up to 45%.

This supplement may help with arthritis and even bipolar disease.

I recommend fatty fish such as salmon, tuna, halibut, herring, etc at least once a week. If you don't eat fish, take fish oil supplements even if you do not have heart disease. This is an all-star supplement...as if you couldn't tell!

### **Flaxseed Oil @@@**

Flaxseeds along with walnuts, peanuts and macadamia contain alpha linolenic acid, an omega-3 fatty acid, which may help to decrease triglycerides, fight cancer and reduce arthritic symptoms. Fish also contain omega-3 fatty acids.

Additionally, flaxseed oil contains lignans, a type of fiber that may have an anticancer effect. With each meal, 1,000 mg can be taken in capsule form.

Flaxseed may not always be converted to omega fatty acids in the body. I prefer fish oil but this vitamin is well tolerated.

### **Ginger @@@@**

A small study demonstrated that ginger at 1 gram daily helped to reduce nausea in pregnant women. No adverse effects on pregnancy outcome were seen. This herb may also be useful for sea sickness.

### **Ginkgo Biloba @@@**

This herb may help with memory in Alzheimer's. There is controversy if it works in normal people with mild memory impairment. A small study in people between 30 and 59 demonstrated better memory recall when given a single 120 mg standardized extract daily(look for 24% flavon glycosides and 6% terpene lactones in the supplement).

On the other hand, another study conducted in people over 60, demonstrated no effect on cognition when given 40 mg three times a day of this herb. The above two

studies were conducted in patients with normal to mildly impaired memory. Ginkgo may also improve memory in Alzheimer's disease but this is still speculative.

Ginkgo can thin the blood; hence do not take with Coumadin (warfarin is the generic), and discontinue 2–3 weeks before surgery. Rarely this herb may cause seizures, and epileptic patients may wish to avoid this agent.

### **Glucosamine @@@1/2**

These supplements may decrease the progression of wear-and-tear arthritis or osteoarthritis. This type of joint disease is more common in women and tends to involve the hips, knees, feet, tips of fingers and the base of thumbs. Loss of cartilage results in painful movement. Tylenol and moderate exercise are the main treatments.

Glucosamine may take 1–3 months to work at 1,500 mg per day in divided doses. This supplement may stimulate cartilage growth as opposed to anti-inflammatories. It also likely works as well as anti-inflammatories but without the stomach and kidney side effects. It may raise blood sugar; hence type 2 diabetics should have their blood sugar monitored. A large meta analysis of Chondroitin indicated that it does not work. Many times chondroitin is combined with glucosamine in one preparation.

Glucosamine Sulfate seems to show more efficacy than Glucosamine Chloride. Since the side effects are low and some studies demonstrate efficacy, it's worth trying the sulfated form of this supplement.

Other therapies for this disease may include vitamins C and E, chondroitin (900–1200 mg a day probably doesn't help but has minimal side effects), MSM (a cheap over-the-counter supplement at 1,000 mg twice a day), Synvisc (a series of three knee injections of a honeylike joint-fluid lubricant which may help with pain for up to 1.5 years) and SAmE (an expensive supplement which may help with joint pain and depression. Taking 600–1,200 mg in divided doses may be useful).

### **Grapeseed Extract @@@1/2**

This is a powerful, well-tolerated antioxidant. It has perhaps 50 times the antioxidant potential of vitamin E.

This vitamin thins the blood which may help to prevent heart attacks. It also strengthens the blood vessels at the same time, thus helping with leg edema.

Grapeseed extract may help with allergies and arthritis.

A component of some grapeseed extracts is called

resveratrol. It may confer the benefits of red wine. In mice it seems to extend lifespan. We don't know if grapeseed extract or resveratrol will increase longevity. Side effects are rare.

### **Green Tea @@@@**

Here is an example of a first rate herb that can reduce the risk of a heart attack by 44% and has a marked anticancer effect.

In one study, moderate to heavy consumers of green tea markedly reduced the mortality due to heart attacks. Heavy consumption was defined as drinking more than 14 cups per week and moderate consumption equated to less than 14 cups per week.

I prefer green tea capsules since it beats drinking multiple cups of green tea daily. Not all green capsules are alike. Some capsules only contain the equivalent of 1 cup of green tea, while other preparations contain more.

Studies in Japan demonstrate low mortality rates from cancer, especially in people who consumed 10 or more cups of green tea per day.

Death rate and heart disease were reduced by 25% in a large prospective Japanese trial. Green tea contains powerful antioxidants called polyphenols. Polyphenols are also found in virgin olive oil...chocolate... red wine...and other foods thought to have extra health benefits.

I prefer a preparation of green tea that is standardized and contains 250 mg of polyphenols or about 4–5 cups of green tea in each capsule. EGCG, a specific polyphenol, inhibits growth of blood vessels into a tumor and may even hinder metastases (spread of a tumor to distant sites in the body).

People who drink a lot of green tea or coffee seem to have a lower risk of developing type 2 diabetes.

In addition to addressing the number one and number two causes of death in the USA (heart attacks and cancer respectively), green tea may also help you to lose weight. It seems to possess thermogenic properties and promotes the breakdown of fats by a mechanism unrelated to its caffeine content. You will need to take more green tea to lose weight. One small study showed a 5% weight loss on green tea. The dosage was 1500 mg daily (polyphenol content of the green tea capsules).

Now the USF team provides the first evidence that EGCG decreases production of the Alzheimer's-related protein, beta-amyloid, which can accumulate abnormally in the brain and lead to nerve damage and memory loss. EGCG appears to block the initial process by which the Alzheimer's-related protein is formed in brain cells.

After treating Alzheimer's mice for several months with daily injections of pure EGCG, the researchers observed a 54% decrease of brain-clogging Alzheimer's plaques. Wow! This is preliminary but exciting.

This is a terrific herb and I prefer the decaffeinated variety.

### **Hawthorn @@@**

This herb confers an array of benefits upon the aging heart. Heart failure patients seem to benefit as it helps to contract the heart better. It also reduces clotting, mildly lowers blood pressure, and dilates the coronary arteries.

A European study showed reduction in heart-failure symptoms such as leg edema, shortness of breath and fatigue. A standardized extract is recommended. Many people take it as a preventative. A standard form (LI132 Faros or WS 1442 Crataegutt) is often used.

### **Kava Kava @@@**

This is a common herb in the Caribbean that is used for anxiety and depression. Like Chinese herbs, this herb can cause liver failure and should only be considered after other standard approaches have been exhausted.

It seems to have a calming effect without affecting mental acuity. A daily dose equivalent to 180 mg of kavalactones should be adequate. The entire 180 mg dose of kavalactones taken at bedtime can help with sleep. Seven small double-blinded controlled trials showed that 60–240 mg two to three times a day of kavalactones helped with anxiety. Kava Kava was used for periods ranging from 1–24 weeks. Few side effects were reported. Sporadic cases of liver failure have been seen, and this herb should be used with caution. High doses can have alcohol-like effects.

### **Lutein @@@1/2**

Lutein is getting popular as the "eye vitamin."

It's a carotenoid...a yellow pigment that's concentrated in the macula. It's thought to help protect the eye from light damage.

A diet high in fruits and veggies that contain lutein seems to reduce the risk of developing macular degeneration.

And a new small study suggests that high doses of a lutein supplement might actually improve macular degeneration.

Researchers are using 10 mg/day.  
Most adults consume only 1 to 2 mg/day of lutein.

Unfortunately it's too soon to tell if lutein supplements can prevent or slow macular degeneration. Frankly why not use it since it is well tolerated.

Certainly eat more green and yellow veggies.

For example, there's 44 mg of lutein per cup of cooked kale... 26 mg/cup of cooked spinach...and 3 mg/cup of broccoli.

### **Niacin @@@@**

This is the best vitamin or drug for raising HDL or good cholesterol. Even if you lower the LDL or bad cholesterol HDL still plays a significant role in preventing or treating coronary disease. More studies will help to prove this point.

Over the counter long acting Niacin may cause liver damage at 1000 mg or more. So it might be best to get a prescription for Niaspan, a well tolerated niacin prescription medicine. This preparation also cuts down the flushing usually attributed to this supplement.

In a study done in patients with heart disease, adding Niacin to a statin reduced further heart events by 90%. This is unheard of and the study bears repeating. Will it help this much in people without heart disease? That is the 64,000 dollar question.

### **Noni Juice @1/2**

This juice is the best selling botanical in the world and probably originates in Southeast Asia. Investigators have identified several antibacterial, antiviral, anthelmintic, and antitumor effects of noni extracts. Among the claims made for noni today are potential benefits in lupus, diabetes, hypertension, drug addiction, AIDS, and cancer. Noni is also sold as a wellness drink.

This is all well and good but there are no known controlled trials to prove this. Studies in mice or in test tubes just don't count. A phase 1 trial is being conducted and currently patients are being enrolled.

There is a question of liver toxicity which is probably rare but more studies need to be done.

Best selling doesn't mean best for you. I suggest waiting on this product till further studies are performed regarding safety and efficacy.

### **Nuts @@@@ 1/2**

Consuming nuts, especially tree nuts, showed a powerful dose-response protective effect against coronary heart disease mortality in the largest-ever prospective cohort study focusing on the relationship between diet, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. New results from the European Prospective Investigation Into Cancer and Nutrition (EPIC) indicate that participants who consumed two servings of nuts per week had an adjusted highly significant 16% reduction in risk of death from coronary heart disease (CHD), compared with those who rarely or never ate nuts,

That's not a lot of nuts. Roughly 20 almonds, for example, constitute a serving. EPIC enrolled more than a half-million adults in 10 European countries during the 1990s. Don't overdo it because nuts contain a lot of calories.

There is also evidence that nuts help prevent diabetes. This kind of resembles the cinnamon story; a pinch of cinnamon cassia (found in the grocery store) at each meal lowers cholesterol, sugar and triglycerides or fats.

Remember not to overdue it with nuts since they contain a high amount of calories. Also nuts are the number one serious food allergy in the US.

### **Panax Ginseng @@@ 1/2**

(Chinese or Korean ginseng). This herb probably helps to improve stress, the immune response, memory, fatigue and blood sugar. The active ingredient are called ginsenosides. Obtain only a standardized extract of 4–7 % ginsenosides, and only use panax ginseng. Do not take if you have hypertension. This herb may cause headaches and possibly vaginal bleeding. It probably does not improve athletic performance. It seems to reduce bacterial counts in acute bronchitis.

### **Probiotics @@@ 1/2**

Probiotics are supplements that often include *Lactobacilli*, *Bifidobacteria* or *Saccharomyces*. Couldn't they make the names simpler?

These friendly bacteria are thought to help reestablish gut flora and crowd out harmful bacteria and at the same time enhance the immune system.

There are many probiotic products and some work better than others. Most can be found at your local drugstore.

Align is new. It's from the makers of *Metamucil*. Some evidence suggests that it might improve irritable bowel symptoms. This effects a large segment of the population.

Activia is a new yogurt promoted for irregularity. It does seem to speed gut transit time but there's no evidence that it helps constipation.

VSL#3 seems to help reduce abdominal pain and bloating due to irritable bowel syndrome. But it may not reduce stool frequency.

Culturelle and Florastor can reduce the chance of developing diarrhea due to antibiotics. We're not sure if it will prevent Clostridium Difficile, a bad bacteria that can invade the bowel after antibiotics. Try these products twice daily while taking an antibiotic. Make sure that you take the product 2 hours away from the antibiotic otherwise you'll destroy the good bacteria that you are ingesting. Continue it for 3-7 days after stopping the antibiotic.

### **Coenzyme Q 10 @@@@**

This is the outstanding vitamin supplement of the twenty-first century. It is actually a brand version of coenzyme Q-10. Q-gel is undoubtedly the best preparation since it maintains much higher blood levels than conventional coenzyme preparations. This natural vitamin, which is in all our cells, has applications for the heart, brain, cancer, longevity, and gum disease. A recent trial showed that high doses of this nutrient slowed Parkinson's disease by 44%! A larger trial is now being conducted.

Coenzyme Q 10 (CoQ10) is in virtually every cell. It plays a crucial role in energy production in the mitochondria. It's also an antioxidant and has membrane-stabilizing properties. Mice live longer when given coenzyme Q-10. what happens in human beings remains to be seen. The side effect profile is excellent.

People take CoQ10 supplements for a variety of uses:

Aging. CoQ10 levels decline with age...but supplements haven't been proven to increase longevity except in mice.

Performance enhancement. CoQ10 is in many sports supplements...but there's no proof that it enhances performance.

Statin myopathy. Statins reduce the synthesis of CoQ10. But there's no proof that CoQ10 supplements prevent myopathy (bad muscle aches and weakness caused by statins). It's worth a try since this vitamin is well tolerated.

Heart disease. CoQ10 might be useful when used with other drugs for heart failure. Some physicians use it to reduce vascular damage during bypass surgery. But some studies show no benefit.

Migraines. CoQ10 100 mg three times (or Q-Gel 30mg 1 pill three times daily)

seems to reduce migraine attacks by about a third. Consider giving it a try for frequent migraines.

Mitochondrial disorders. CoQ10 (ubiquinone) is an orphan drug for rare mitochondrial disorders.

CoQ10 is safe and well tolerated.

### **Red Yeast Rice @@**

This over the counter supplement is essentially a weak statin and is no safer than a statin. It is certainly less efficacious. You can still get the liver test elevation and muscle aches that a statin causes.

Since statins have been thoroughly tested for 25 years, it is best to take an FDA regulated drug then a weak over the counter unregulated supplement that likely violates multiple statin patents.

### **Saw Palmetto @@@@**

Benign prostatic hypertrophy is quite common and affects 50% of men by age 60. Symptoms include slow stream, hesitancy, urinating at night and sometimes irritation upon urination.

Saw palmetto probably blocks the conversion of testosterone to dihydrotestosterone which likely causes the enlargement of the prostate. It works similar to Proscar. A large scale study showed no effect but so many of my patients do feel it works. Since the side effects are low (nausea) it is worth trying.

Try taking 320 mg of saw palmetto at bedtime for two months to see if it helps.

### **Selenium @1/2**

Over 35% of people take a multivitamin or mineral supplement that includes selenium. It's in *Centrum*, *One-A-Day*, and others.

And many websites promote selenium supplements...as an antioxidant to lower blood sugar and prevent cancer.

The jury is still out whether selenium affects cancer risk.

But evidence is mounting that selenium causes more harm than good on the risk of type 2 diabetes.

In fact, taking 200 mcg of selenium daily for about 7 years seems to raise diabetes risk by about 50% compared to placebo.

These effects may be linked to selenium's narrow therapeutic range and potential PRO-oxidant effects (as opposed to an antioxidant effect) at higher doses.

### **Soy @@**

This supplement contains isoflavones (phytoestrogens) such as genestein and daidzein which may help thwart the growth of prostate and breast cancer cells. Additionally, the protein in soy (isolated soy protein), may lower cholesterol and triglycerides.

Soy may also help to relieve the symptoms of menopause such as hot flashes, vaginal dryness and irritability, since it is a phytoestrogen. Good sources include tofu, soy milk, and soybeans. You need about 60 mg of soy protein a day to possibly help with hot flashes. A cup of tofu contains 20 grams of soy protein.

Newer research shows that soy can only lower LDL or bad cholesterol by 3%. It doesn't raise the good cholesterol and it doesn't lower pressure.

Its effect on breast cancer remains controversial. Soy protein has a modest effect upon menopausal symptoms as previously stated.

In this case, it may be wiser to eat foods containing soy rather than direct supplementation.

### **St. John's Wart @@@1/2**

This herb is prescribed ten to one over Prozac in Europe for depression. It helps patients with depression 70% of the time. Side effects are few and include nausea and rarely a skin rash when exposed to the sun. Taking 900–1,200 mg per day of a standardized .3% extract can be helpful in treating this disease in divided doses.

Do not combine with prescription antidepressants. This herb may cause cataracts and does interact with digoxin, a heart drug. Discontinue prior to surgery. Finally this herb may reduce the effectiveness of the birth control pill and interacts with some HIV drugs.

It probably does not work in moderate to severe depression. It is best to use this herb in mild cases of depression. SAME at 400mg -1600mg daily can help with arthritis and depression but is quite expensive.

### **Vitamin A and Beta Carotene @@**

This vitamin is found in green, orange and yellow fruits and vegetables. It may help to diminish certain cancers and heart attacks. Avoid this vitamin if you are alcoholic due to effects on the liver and if you are a smoker (smoking plus vitamin A may increase lung cancers beyond smoking alone).

This vitamin may also block vitamin D's ability to help absorb calcium. Postmenopausal women, not on hormone replacement, should take 10,000 units or less of vitamin A to help the possible side effect of osteoporosis.

In the *Archives of Internal Medicine* — 4000 men randomized at a mean age of 56 to take 50 mg of beta carotene (a vitamin A derivative) or placebo on alternate days. After 18 years, those taking beta carotene had slightly better cognition on a variety of tests. The effect was the equivalent of delaying cognitive aging by 1 to 1.5 years. A second group of men randomized to short-term beta carotene supplementation (average of 1 year) did not see any cognitive benefit. It is too early to conclude that this supplement will help mental decline. Vegetable juice did the same thing and is likely healthier.

### **Vitamin B Complex @@1/2**

More evidence suggests that high-dose B vitamins are not beneficial for patients with heart disease.

We know that homocysteine levels are often elevated in patients with heart disease. And these levels can be lowered with high doses of folic acid, pyridoxine, and B12.

But we don't know if using these vitamins to lower homocysteine actually prevents cardiovascular events.

The big question is whether homocysteine is just a marker... or an actual cause...of heart disease.

Now a new study suggests that folic acid and pyridoxine do not prevent recurrent strokes or heart attacks...even though these vitamins lead to a 28% reduction in homocysteine levels.

In fact, supplementation with both vitamins seems to increase the risk of cardiovascular disease.

One theory is that high doses of folic acid trigger cell growth and might cause cell overgrowth inside the arteries.

What happened to this vitamin? We used to think that it reduced heart disease and colon cancer but well designed trials show that it doesn't help at all and may actually be mildly harmful.

Certainly this vitamin can help to prevent neural tube defects and should definitely be utilized during pregnancy.

Using combinations of B vitamins does not slow dementia. 14 studies were reviewed. Homocysteine is a chemical in the body that contributes to heart disease and dementia. Lowering this chemical with the use of B vitamins does not improve heart disease or memory. Sometimes a logical intervention does not work.

If you have a B12 deficiency (can cause memory issues and neurologic problems) replacement with B12 and folate may be useful in treating these problems. Even if the level of B12 is borderline in the blood, get it treated since the blood tests are not totally accurate. This is a crucial intervention with a B vitamin that can be helpful.

800 micrograms of folic acid daily seems to decrease the rate of hearing loss. This is the first medicine/supplement that may help to slow down the loss of hearing. More studies are needed to confirm. So in patients without heart disease and hearing decline, folic acid (a B vitamin) may be helpful.

A B vitamin called niacin can help to increase HDL or good cholesterol this is generally beneficial in preventing heart disease.

### **Vitamin C @@@**

Fruits probably play a role in cancer prevention and possibly supplementation with Vitamin C will do the same. This vitamin does not work to shrink tumors.

Of course Vitamin C will prevent scurvy (This doctor has only seen one case in 30 years).

1000 mg – 3000 mg of Vit C will decrease the duration of a cold by about 1 day but there is no proof that vitamin C prevents a cold. Also taking higher doses during a cold may increase the side effects of this vitamin such as stomach upset. It still might be worth a try.

High doses of vitamin C (500 mg or more) may cause plaque to form in our carotid arteries. Vitamin C supplementation at 300 mg daily in postmenopausal diabetic women seems to increase heart disease. Another study showed that an extra serving of fruit a day (more vitamin C food sources), reduced overall mortality by 20%! Whether vitamin C supplementation increases or decreases heart disease remains controversial.

Taking vitamin C 500 mg orally, in combination with elemental zinc 80 mg, vitamin E 400 IU, and beta-carotene 15 mg daily seems to provide a risk reduction of 27% for visual acuity loss and a risk reduction of 25% for progression of AMD (Acute Macular Degeneration—the number one cause of blindness).

Vitamin C cream can also help to reduce wrinkles.

Linus Pauling took 18,000 mg daily but he had to increase it gradually. He lived to be 95 and this two time Nobel Prize winner believed strongly in this vitamin. We need more controlled studies. Consider taking 500 mg daily or just eat citrus fruits.

### **Vitamin D @@@@**

Now this vitamin (really a hormone) **is the sleeper movie**. It's a downright all-star but few people know about it.

Vitamin D deficiency is associated with an increased risk of breast, colon, prostate, pancreatic and ovarian cancer. Researchers think vitamin D might have antiproliferative effects in these cancers. Recent research seems to support this hypothesis. Higher vitamin D serum levels seem to be associated with a reduced risk of cancer and cancer-related mortality in men and possibly in women. And people with higher intakes of vitamin D appear to have a lower risk for pancreatic cancer. More studies are needed.

This hormone can also reduce hip fractures. Osteoporosis kills more people than almost all cancers combined. Vitamin D also helps to prevent falls and reduce muscle pain. It reduces falls in nursing homes by 50%.

Higher levels of vitamin D are associated with better memory, lung function, swallowing and bladder function and possibly reduced incidence of Multiple Sclerosis.

Heart disease prevention may also occur with this wonderful vitamin. Higher sunlight regions have less heart attacks. Once again more studies are required.

Taking 800 units to 1000 units a day is reasonable especially if you are 65 or older. There are usually 400 units in a multiple vitamin and pure vitamin D can be found cheaply over the counter. The best type is cholecalciferol or Vitamin D 3 which is well absorbed.

### **Vitamin E @@**

This vitamin can possibly boost the immune system, delay institutionalization in Alzheimer patients, relieve leg cramps, possibly decrease menopausal symptoms and fibrocystic breasts and decrease the incidence of aggressive prostate tumors.

This vitamin is nevertheless starting to fall out of favor. There are over 19 studies that show an increased mortality with vitamin E supplementation of 400 units a day or more. Will natural vitamin E or gamma Vitamin E cause more deaths? We don't know but it is wise to stay away from this vitamin.

At 2000 units daily it does slow dementia.

A large trial called SELECT, will examine if Vit E at 400 units a day plus selenium at 200 mcg per day can prevent prostate cancer. In the past Vit E seemed to have an effect in reducing this disease.

Take the natural d-alpha vitamin E not the cheaper dl-synthetic if you decide to take this vitamin. One study published in 2002 showed no effect of vitamin E at 200 units a day upon the frequency of upper respiratory infections.

In dialysis patients, vitamin E at 800 units per day reduced the risk of stroke and heart attacks.

While this vitamin may be helpful for the prevention and treatment of Alzheimer's and prostate cancer, it does not seem helpful for the prevention heart disease or respiratory infections. Certainly do not take over 400 units a day and you may wish to buy the natural d-alpha vitamin E since the negative studies didn't use this type of supplement.

### **Valerian Root @@@**

This herb likely works for sleep when taken in dosages of 200 mg to 900 mg nightly. This herb smells like dirty socks. You will recognize the smell when you open up the bottle. This herb may be worth a try for sleep disorders if you don't want to try standard medications.

Kava may help some people who can't sleep because of anxiety.

Chamomile, passionflower, lemon balm, and lavender have mild sedative effects...but there's not nearly enough evidence that they work for insomnia.

### **Weight Loss supplements @@1/2**

Most of these supplements are of unproven value but it's a billion dollar plus business.

Ads claim *Akavar 20/50* is a "European breakthrough" that allows people to eat all they want and still shed the pounds.

But these claims are way too good to be true.

*Akavar 20/50* contains multiple sources of caffeine...including guarana, yerba mate,

and green tea. Each dose has 200 mg caffeine.

Dieters often use caffeine to try to increase energy... boost metabolism... suppress appetite... and for its diuretic effect.

There's really no proof that caffeine or *Akavar 20/50* cause significant weight reduction. Caution combining *Akavar 20/50* with coffee or other caffeine-containing products.

All sorts of diets can work for weight loss.

Low-carb diets are more popular than ever.

South Beach is the latest...it's a spin-off of the Atkins diet.

The South Beach diet focuses on "good" versus "bad" carbs.

The "bad" carbs (sugar, white flour, etc) have a high glycemic index...and rapidly increase blood glucose.

The "good" carbs (some veggies and grains) have a low glycemic index. They are absorbed more slowly and therefore do not increase blood sugar as much.

But the good-carb, bad-carb idea is controversial.

Both South Beach and Atkins help some people...probably by reducing food intake. Eating proteins and fats reduces hunger.

Weight Watchers and The Zone are more balanced...they don't exclude food groups. These may be better for long-term weight loss as it may be easier to adhere to the diet. Actually all of these diets obtain about the same success rate at 1 year. Involve your doc or dietician in the decision making process.

Lots of dietary supplements are already out on the market.

"Starch blockers" are popular. They contain a kidney bean extract that is said to inhibit alpha-amylase in the gut...and therefore inhibit carbohydrate absorption.

I don't recommend them. There's no proof that they work.

"Fat blockers" are also heavily promoted. They often contain fibrous products such as chitosan, psyllium, glucomannan, etc.

These products can bind cholesterol in the gut but there's no reliable evidence that they help people to reduce their weight.

Variations of ephedra with "safer-sounding" names will stay on the market. Remember to avoid any products that list ephedra...ma huang...bitter orange...country mallow...or heartleaf. These all contain ephedrine-like stimulants. These agents may be associated with strokes or heart attacks. Bitter orange is often used in "ephedra-free" products...but it contains the stimulant synephrine. Stimulants can cause cardiovascular problems...especially when combined with caffeine.

Caffeine doses could be much higher than people expect.

ConsumerLab's tests suggest that *Lean System 7* provides as much caffeine as 7 colas a day (280 mg) plus synephrine...*Ripped Fuel Ephedra Free* as much caffeine as over 14

colas a day plus synephrine.

The caffeine in a daily dose of *Xenadrine EFX Ephedrine Free* could be as high as 11 colas...*Zantrex-3* as high as 30 colas. I think these stimulants are potentially dangerous. Don't die to lose weight.

Lots of people are trying *Alli*, (AL-eye) the new OTC orlistat for weight loss. Make sure you have realistic expectations. *Alli* is half the strength of Rx orlistat (*Xenical*)...but efficacy and side effects are similar and this is a drug and not a supplement or vitamin.

Ads claim that *Alli* helps people lose 50% more weight than diet alone. But this translates to an average of only 3 to 5 lbs in 6 months.

*Alli* prevents absorption of about 25% of the fat in a meal.

But the unabsorbed fat has to go somewhere...causing oily stools, urgency, and spotting.

So the best advice is to limit fat to 15 to 20 g per meal...the amount in just a small cheeseburger, 3 oz steak, or a tablespoon of oil.

Make sure to take a daily multivitamin at bedtime, especially if you stick with *Alli* long-term. *Alli* can reduce absorption of fat soluble vitamins...A, D, E, K, and beta-carotene.

Please remember that success with *Alli* depends on sticking to lifestyle changes...better eating habits and exercise.

Some patients have been waiting for rimonabant (*Acomplia*, *Zimulti*)...the "wonder drug" that was supposed to help people lose weight, stop smoking, and reduce cardiovascular risk. This drug is approved in Europe and blocks marijuana receptors in the brain. It has not been approved in the US since it may cause depression.

People want the skinny on the new "Brazilian Diet Pills."

These come in lots of different formulations and go by names such as *Brazilian Diet*, *Emagrece Sim*, *Body Slim*, etc.

Some of these are herbal blends. They contain laxatives such as cascara and senna...guarana for its stimulant and diuretic effects...and other herbs purported to decrease appetite.

But some of these products actually contain Rx drugs such as amphetamines, diazepam, and fluoxetine.

Please stay away from any of these Brazilian Diet Pills as you may not know what you are getting.

Pyruvate is probably not effective for losing weight...and labeled amounts can be misleading.

For example, the label of *Pinnacle Pyruvate 1000 BioActive Fat Modulator* says it contains 1000 mg of "pyruvate-complex"...but this complex provides only 600 mg of pyruvate.

Conjugated linoleic acid may improve lean body weight...but doesn't cause weight loss. The *Allmax Nutrition CLA* tested contained only 75% of what's listed on the label. Also this agent may increase sugar especially in diabetics.

Chromium probably isn't effective for weight loss...and high doses could cause blood, kidney, or liver disorders.

*TrimSpa X32* had 40% more chromium than on the label...an amount that is higher than what is generally recognized as safe.

There are differing opinions on the actual amount of stimulants in these products...and the safety of stimulants in general.

Hoodia grows in the South African desert.

Tribal hunters have used it for centuries...to stave off hunger and thirst during long treks.

The theory is that hoodia contains a chemical that makes people less hungry...and consume fewer calories. Pfizer even started some research on one of its constituents.

There is no reliable evidence saying hoodia works...or is safe even though it appeared on the news show "60 Minutes".

Green Tea capsules help with a 5% weight loss. You need to consume about 1500 mg of Green Tea polyphenols to increase heat production (thermogenesis) and obtain weight loss.

This is not an easy field since most of the weight loss supplements are shams except for perhaps green tea. Xenical (and lower strength OTC Alli) and Meridia are approved for weight loss and can help with a 5% weight loss. They don't interact with green tea. Perhaps combining the supplement with a standard drug can help. A small glass of grapefruit juice may help before meals. There is some weight noted. Check with your doc before starting grapefruit juice since there are many interactions with medicines. Also behavioral modification is critical. Exercise and make it fun for you. Weight Watchers seems to have the biggest following with lots of successes. Just like high blood pressure, if lifestyle changes and the supplements/medications work, then long term treatment will be necessary to maintain success.

### **This doctor's Lifesaver tips**

— The best supplements in my estimation include cinnamon, Vitamin D (in your Mega Multiple), Green Tea, Coenzme Q -10 , Fish oil (our double strength fish oil), Niacin, Nuts and Grapeseed Extract (our Resveratrol). Always check with your doctor but I base my above assumptions from evidence contained in the literature, side effect profiles and my own experience with treating patients.

**Continue to read my Lifesaver's e-newsletter to keep up to date about weight loss, supplements and the latest practical medical information.**

Live well, Laugh often, Love much,

Evan L. Lipkis MD

Evan L. Lipkis, MD, is a successful practicing internist who has been in the field of medicine for more than 25 years. He trained at Northwestern University Medical School and presently practices at Glenbrook Hospital in Illinois. He has served as the past president of the American Cancer Society (locally), hosted "Medical Insight" on WTMX radio and lectured nationally with Dr. C. Everett Koop, the former Surgeon General. He now serves as the medical consultant for WGN radio. Dr. Lipkis also is an editor for Prescriber's Letter, a national newsletter for physicians. His new book, Live Longer and Healthier Now! gives you the practical, up-to-date knowledge you need to live a better quality of life. It's like having a doctor in your own house. His new column, Lifesavers, just might save your life! Dr. Lipkis is one of the top 50 doctors in the Midwest according to [www.checkbook.org](http://www.checkbook.org), a Consumer Report's endorsed organization.