

September 15, 2003

Kathryn McMurry  
HHS Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion  
200 Independence Avenue, SW, Room 738-G  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Ms. McMurry:

Over the last several years, a growing body of literature has emerged detailing the important role nutrients play in the prevention of many types of chronic disease.

The science supporting optimal nutrition for disease prevention has only gotten stronger in the past few years, while simultaneously, the average American's diet has progressively gotten worse. As you well know, a large percentage of Americans do not eat the right mix of foods to meet the latest DRIs. And while getting people to eat a more varied, balanced diet should be the priority, there is a simple and inexpensive way to help Americans get many of the micronutrients they need – encourage use of a multivitamin.

Multivitamins – as a complement to a healthy diet – are a simple, safe and cost-effective preventive measure. Several recent studies have shown their efficacy:

- In June 2002, an article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* recommended that all Americans take a multivitamin daily to help prevent chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer and osteoporosis.<sup>1</sup>
- This summer, the *Journal of Nutrition* published the results of the Stockholm Heart Study, which showed that the use of multivitamins may aid in the prevention of heart attacks.<sup>2</sup>
- In March, a study published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* found that multivitamin use decreased the risk of infection for people with diabetes.<sup>3</sup>
- And the science continues to mount demonstrating the potential of daily multivitamin use to:
  - Reduce the incidence of neural tube defects by 50 percent or more<sup>4</sup>
  - Decrease the number of sick days in the elderly due to infectious illnesses by up to 50 percent<sup>5</sup>
  - Delay or avoid more than 20 percent of hip fractures caused by osteoporosis<sup>6</sup>
  - Delay the onset of cataracts and age-related macular degeneration<sup>7, 8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Fletcher RH, Fairfield KM. (2002) Vitamins for chronic disease prevention in adults: clinical applications. *JAMA*: Jun 19; 287(23):3127-9.

<sup>2</sup> Holmquist C, Larsson S, Wolk A, de Faire U. (2003) "Multivitamin supplements are inversely associated with risk of myocardial infarction in men and women--Stockholm Heart Epidemiology Program (SHEEP)." *J Nutr*. Aug; 133(8):2650-4.

<sup>3</sup> Barringer TA, Kirk JK, Santaniello AC, Foley KL, Michielutte R. (2003) "Effect of a multivitamin and mineral supplement on infection and quality of life. A randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial." *Ann Intern Med*.: Mar 4; 138(5):365-71.

<sup>4</sup> Scholl TO, Hediger ML, Bendich A, et al. (1997) "Use of Multivitamin/Mineral Prenatal Supplements: Influence on the Outcome of Pregnancy." *Am J Epidemiol*, Vol 146(No 2); 134-141.

<sup>5</sup> Chandra RK. (1992) "Effect of vitamin and trace-element supplementation on immune responses and infection in elderly subjects." *Lancet*: 340: 1124-1127.

<sup>6</sup> Heaney, RP. (1993) "Thinking straight about calcium." *New Engl J Med*: 328: 503-505.

<sup>7</sup> Seddon JM, Ajani UA, Sperduto RD, Hiller R, Blair N, Burton TC, Farber MD, Gragoudas ES, Haller J, Miller DT, et al. (1994) "Dietary carotenoids, vitamins A, C and E, and advanced age-related macular degeneration." *J Am Med Assn*: 272: 1413-1420.


- Reduce the incidence of heart disease, stroke and possibly Alzheimer's<sup>9,10</sup>
- Protect against some types of cancer<sup>11</sup>

Enclosed, please find:

- An annotated bibliography of recent studies that illustrate the preventive effects of both multivitamins and certain individual micronutrients, as well as a listing of articles that show how preventive vitamin supplementation can help reduce long-term healthcare costs.
- A copy of "The Benefits and Risks of Vitamins and Minerals," a special report prepared by the editors of the *Harvard Health Letter* and edited by Meir J. Stampfer, M.D., Ph.D., professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health. According to this guide, "...many experts agree that most people should take a daily multivitamin supplement. It's hard to get all of the essential nutrients you need from food alone, so supplements provide a handy backup to a healthy diet."<sup>12</sup>
- Council for Responsible Nutrition's report, "The Benefits of Nutritional Supplements," which reviewed more than a decade's-worth of the most scientifically significant studies measuring the health benefits of multivitamins and other nutritional supplements. The report found that ongoing use of multivitamins (preferably with minerals) and other single-nutrient supplements demonstrated quantifiable positive impact in areas ranging from strengthening the immune system of highly-vulnerable elderly patients, to drastically reducing the risk of neural tube birth defects such as spina bifida.

We hope you find this information helpful as you go about revising the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Sincerely,



Annette Dickinson, Ph.D.  
President  
Council for Responsible Nutrition

---

<sup>8</sup> AREDS Research Group. (2001) "A randomized, placebo-controlled, clinical trial of high-dose supplementation with vitamins C, E, beta-carotene and zinc for age-related macular degeneration and vision loss." *Arch Ophthalmol* 119:1417-1436.

<sup>9</sup> Rimm EB, Willett WC, Hu FB, et al. (1998) "Folate and Vitamin B6 from diet and supplements in relation to risk of coronary heart disease among women." *JAMA*, 279:359-364.

<sup>10</sup> Engelhart MJ, Geerlings MI, Ruitenberg A, van Swieten JC, Hofman A, Witteman JC, Breteler MM. (2002) "Dietary intake of antioxidants and risk of Alzheimer disease." *JAMA*, 26;287(24):3223-9.

<sup>11</sup> The Alpha-Tocopherol Beta Carotene Cancer Prevention Study Group. (1994). "The effect of vitamin E and beta carotene on the incidence of lung cancer and other cancers in male smokers." *New England Journal Medicine*, 330: 1029-1035.

<sup>12</sup> Stampfer, Meir, MD, PhD, ed. (2003) The Benefits and Risks of Vitamins and Minerals: What You Need to Know. Boston: Harvard Health Publications. Pg. 31.