



**Council for Responsible Nutrition**

*The Science Behind the Supplements*

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## **VITAMIN E SHOWN TO HELP FIGHT UPPER RESPIRATORY TRACT INFECTIONS, ESPECIALLY COLDS, IN THE ELDERLY**

WASHINGTON, D.C., *August 17, 2004* – Vitamin E supplementation has potential benefit in fighting upper respiratory tract infections such as colds in the elderly, says a study published in the Aug. 18 issue of *JAMA*. According to the Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN), one of the dietary supplement industry's leading trade associations, this is one more positive study to add to the mounting scientific evidence that vitamin E is beneficial for improved immune function in the elderly.

The randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial, conducted by Simin Nikbin Meydani, D.V.M., Ph.D., and colleagues at Tufts University, included 617 elderly, long-term care facility patients. All patients were given a multivitamin with 50 percent of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of key micronutrients; 311 of the patients were given an additional daily capsule of 200 IU vitamin E, while the control group of 306 were given a placebo. Fewer people in the vitamin E group suffered one or more upper respiratory tract infections. The researchers also observed that those given the vitamin E supplement had a 20 percent lower risk of catching a cold than the participants given the placebo. There was no effect on lower respiratory tract infections.

The protective effect of vitamin E against upper respiratory tract infections, particularly the

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common cold, shown in this study is very promising, especially given the preponderance of such illnesses in the elderly and the potential for colds to lead to more severe illness. As the study authors explain, “Respiratory tract infections are prevalent in elderly individuals, resulting in increased morbidity, mortality, and use of health care services.”

CRN President Annette Dickinson, Ph.D., says of the study, “This study further illuminates the importance of vitamin E supplementation for the elderly, who are generally at risk for nutrient inadequacy. It is recognized that nutrition has a major impact on disease resistance, and Meydani’s group has previously shown that vitamin E supplementation improves measures of immune response. The current study shows an impact on actual disease incidence.”

Dr. Dickinson noted that all of the participants in both the placebo and vitamin E groups were given a low-dose multivitamin, since nursing home residents are known to be prone to inadequate intakes. She said, “This was good procedure, and some experts have advocated that multivitamins be provided to nursing home residents as a matter of policy to avoid the consequences of inadequate nutrient intakes. However, it is possible that the multivitamin attenuated the effects of the vitamin E supplement.”

In the *JAMA* article, the authors conclude that the study’s findings “suggest important implications for the well-being of the elderly” and call for future studies to further assess the effect of vitamin E supplementation on the common cold, incorporating more detailed analysis on the nutrient’s effect on specific pathogens.

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**Note to Editor:** The Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN), founded in 1973, is a Washington, D.C.-based trade association representing dietary supplement industry ingredient suppliers and manufacturers. CRN members adhere to a strong code of ethics, comply with dosage limits and manufacture dietary supplements to high quality standards under good manufacturing practices. For more information on CRN, visit <http://www.crnusa.org>.