

P.O. Box 982

Evanston, Illinois 60204

IN THIS ISSUE: Vitamins



My education on the subject of vitamins began only about 15 years ago. My teachers, whom I know both through their writings and personally, include those who are no longer alive--Emory Thurston and Adele Davis, as well as those who are very much alive--Carlton Fredericks, Paavo Airola, Dale Alexander, Michio Kushi, Earl Mindell, Nick Bosco, Kurt Donsbach, Arnold Fox, Norman Cousins. They often disagree with one another, sometimes vigorously, but all are in the same ballpark, and I respect each one of them.

BULK RATE U.S. POSTAGE PAID PERMIT NO. 9323 CHICAGO, IL

Dr. Robert Mendelsohn In contrast, the medical establishment's attitudes on vitamins still are governed by the "junk food trio"--Harvard's Frederick Stare, the American Medical Association's Phillip White, and New York's Victor Herbert. They believe that chemica-

lized foods are not harmful, and they still cling desperately to the notion of "minimum daily requirements."

VOL. 7, NO. 1

While this issue of my Newsletter is directed to every reader, you may correctly notice that (as a result of my background in pediatrics), I single out children's vitamins for special attention. But all patients, young and old alike, need to be educated to protect themselves from unwise prescribing.

Before discussing vitamins with your own doctor, ask him whether he has read Linus Pauling on Vitamin C or Wilfrid Shute, M.D., on Vitamin E. If he hasn't, remember that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. And a little knowledge about vitamins is all your doctor may have.



Our 18-month-old son refuses to eat meat of any kind. We've tried hiding it in other foods, but he refuses to continue eating it after he takes a couple of bites.

My wife is a vegetarian, but I am your basic meat eater. Our son was totally breastfed until he was eight months old, and he was weaned at one year of age. Other than for his reluctance to eat meat, he has a very well-balanced diet and is the picture of health. He has had only one cold, and he has had very little trouble teething.

Our doctor says the only thing he may be lacking for proper growth is Vitamin B-12. He agrees that our son appears to be very healthy, but he recommends a blood test to check his B-12 level. When we asked about supplementing with a vitamin, the doctor said he had "moral problems" with that kind of care.

My wife and I both feel a supplement is the lesser evil compared to taking our son to a hospital to have blood drawn periodically. Can you give us information about B-12 supplements? What are the dangers?--R.L.



In his classic book, "Diet and Nutrition," Rudolph Ballentine, M.D., writes: "Vitamin B-12 is unique in many ways. First, it is a vitamin which is needed by the body in the tiniest amounts. Only a few thousandths of a milligram per day is necessary to prevent the symptoms of Do vegetarians deficiency."

need B-12?

Dr. Ballentine points out that Vitamin B-12 is not found in pasupplemental tients on strictly vegetarian diets (those without dairy products).

In addition to its presence in meat, B-12 is also present in milk and eggs and is manufactured by many bacteria and yeasts. Since organicallygrown foods often will contain traces of bacteria from the soil, such foods alone may be enough to provide the extremely small doses of Vitamin B-12 that the body needs. But when foods are treated with pesticides or by processing, bacteria are likely to be thoroughly exterminated, thus removing any traces of Vitamin B-12.

Instead of referring to his "moral problems," your doctor would have done better if he had stuck to medicine and had asked you whether your son eats eggs and dairy products, since the few cases of Vitamin B-12 deficiency that have been reported in vegetarians have occurred in those who avoided not only meat, fish, and fowl, but also eggs and dairy products. He also should have asked whether you feed your son organically-grown food or processed food (distinctions that are well-known in vegetarian circles). By thus obtaining a careful history, and by performing a proper physical examination as well, the doctor shouldn't need to send you to the hospital for blood tests, the dangers of which you accurately point out.

Since doctors know little about vegetarianism, I usually recommend that patients who are vegetarians keep that information to themselves. On learning that a patient rejects meat, a doctor may get nervous enough to give what I call the "voodoo curse" of the religion of modern medicine, i.e., threatening Vitamin B-12 deficiency with all its attendant symptoms. So hit the books and amass the information your doctor doesn't know about, and then try to convince him to sit down and learn, together with you and your wife.

I am totally nursing our healthy two-month-old daughter whom I delivered by natural childbirth. Our family doctor now wants to give the baby multivitamins with fluoride drops (he suggests Vi-Daylin/F). I questioned him on this because I still take the vitamins I took during pregnancy, and I carefully eat a well-balanced diet.

The doctor says there is no way I can give our daughter Vitamins C and D or fluoride. How do you feel about this? Is it essential that the baby have these vitamins and/or fluoride at this stage of her life?--K.B.



fluoride/vitamin

Within days after your letter arrived, a major article appeared in a Chicago newspaper in which a children's dentist recommended that pregnant women and infants take fluoride supplements; another children's dentist recommended against fluorides to pregnant women or very young infants; Breastfeeding the FDA stated that fluoride supplements during pregnancy are not effecand tive in protecting the unborn child against tooth decay, and the American Dental Association expressed concern that too many supplements will supplements be given in areas where the drinking water is already fluoridated. The article fails to deal with those who consider fluoridation dangerous and possibly carcinogenic, as exemplified by the book, "Fluoridation, the Great Dilemma," by George Waldbott, M.D. (Coronado Press, \$14.95).

I hardly am ever surprised when doctors feel they can improve on human milk. For many years, doctors recommended extra Vitamin D until they found out that breast milk contained plenty of that substance. For decades, doctors recommended extra iron until they found that breastfed babies can absorb and utilize the iron in their mother's milk much better than the doctors ever thought possible.

Now, we're going through the same nonsense with fluorides, presumably based on the assumption of modern pediatricians that God made a mistake when he didn't fluoridate mother's milk.

Vitamin pills

I recently read of an ll-year-old boy who complained of not being no substitute able to swallow even the smallest pill. His mother was giving him vitafor proper mins, and the child said he almost choked on them. The mother asked diet another medical columnist for help. The answer to her question by the doctor-columnist consisted of several suggested methods by which the pill might be swallowed successfully.

> As far as I'm concerned, the most important question is not how to take the pill, but why it should be taken at all. I doubt that the boy shows signs of scurvy or pellegra or any other easily recognized vitamin deficiency. I'd also venture that he probably isn't taking high doses of Vitamin C for whatever value it may have in preventing or treating colds. I would guess he was taking those pills because his mother considered it the "thing to do."

In the absence of clear-cut deficiency, children's vitamins could be a waste of time and money. They may have value as a placebo; a child may think he's healthy just because he's taking a pill that's supposed to make him feel good.

Personally, I don't feel that such "magical" effects justify either random prescription of vitamins by pediatricians or pervasive advertising of these products by drug companies. Vitamin and trace-mineral advocates are correct in saying that present-day diets make it very difficult to satisfy our bodies' nutritional needs adequately, but the mere ingestion of vitamin pills falls far short of what's needed for a proper diet. Furthermore, there's no real agreement among members of the medical profession or even nutritional authorities on which vitamin pills are the most effective, and there's even less agreement on what the proper dosage is of the different vitamins.

There are, however, some opinions that too much of some vitamins may be as bad as too little. A National Institutes of Health study has stated that since the toxicity factor of Vitamin C has not been scientifically determined, "It does not seem worthwhile to take two capsules or tablets three times a day for the rest of one's life to achieve such a small and equivocal benefit."

I, for one, am not willing to substitute vitamin imbalance for vitamin deficiency. There is no substitute for good, unadulterated nutritious food. In my opinion, the boy who asked about vitamins should be advised about a good diet rather than about how to get a pill down his gullet.

Vitamin C

A test in Middlesex, England investigated the effects of taking 10 and the grams of ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) during the first two and one-half days common cold for symptoms of the common cold. Of 1,524 volunteers recruited from various working groups in different parts of the country, colds developed in 482. There was no evidence that upper respiratory or general constitutional symptoms were alleviated by ascorbic acid. The conclusion of this

trial was that ascorbic acid is of no value in treating the common cold. (JAMA, February 20, 1978) (Ed. note: While the see-saw battle around Vitamin C continues, my wife still swears by it.)

Q



Too many vitamins? I take a multi-vitamin mineral tablet, a Vitamin B complex, an iron and calcium tablet, two Vitamin E tablets, and two $\frac{1}{2}$ gram capsules of lecithin. I'm a moderately active 30-year-old female. Am I getting all the vitamins I need or am I overdoing it?--M.S.

I sometimes think that our entire country can be divided into two major groups. The first pops pills which contain medicines, and this group usually looks skeptically at the second group which consists of those who pop pills which contain vitamins and minerals. The second group, quite knowledgeable about the side effects of medicine pills, regards the first group with a jaundiced eye. But the problem facing Group 2, to which you belong, is that scientific information on the kind of supplementary nutrients which should be taken and the proper dosage which should be used still is quite meagre. Despite the pioneering efforts of investigators including Emanuel Cheraskin, Theron Randolph, and Linus Pauling, I think everyone would agree that the field of scientific nutrition remains in its infancy.

While many experts prescribe a variety of nutritional regimens that can be effective and safe (unfortunately, the various prescriptions often conflict with each other), others stress the hazards of overdosage as well as the possibility of harmful interactions. Thus, William H. Crosby, M.D., of the Scripps Clinic and Research Foundation and a member of the editorial board of the Journal of the American Medical Association, opposes further iron fortification of food because of the risk of hemochromatosis, a serious illness resulting from the pileup of iron in the skin, pancreas, liver, heart, and other organs. Pediatricians long have been concerned that iron supplements given to mothers have a way of being accidentally ingested by their toddlers, resulting in a high rate of often-fatal iron poisoning. While Canadian researchers have found evidence that large doses of Vitamin C can damage the genes of human cells, other biochemists have shown that Vitamin C tablets which are stored for a long period of time may break down into chemical compounds capable of causing diabetes and kidney stones.

The potential risks of hypervitaminosis A and D (increased intracranial pressure, resulting in headache, vomiting, drowsiness, irritability, changes in the hair and skin; overgrowth of bones; calcification of the kidney) are well-known. However, counterbalancing these concerns are the obvious deficiencies in the American diet which make it difficult, if not impossible, to receive optimal nutrition from food alone.

Since you are a 30-year-old female, I presume you are aware that the highest incidence of iron deficiency anemia in our country occurs in women of childbearing age, since in modern times, women are not protected by pregnancies and prolonged breastfeeding from the iron loss associated with repeated menstrual periods. The experience of the past several decades provides little evidence that either iron pills or food does much to alleviate this kind of anemia.

In the absence of any real scientific consensus on the subject of nutritional supplements, each one of us must regard himself as an individual experiment in which different supplements may be tried, providing that we do what any researcher would do, namely that we blend our inborn commonsense with wide reading on this controversial subject.



About four months ago, my husband developed Bell's palsy. He takes Vitamin B for it, but he doesn't seem to be getting much better. What causes Bell's palsy, and what kind of treatment do you recommend?--D.B.



Bell's palsy and Vitamin B

Whenever you see a person's name attached to a disease, you can be pretty sure that doctors don't know very much about it. This is certainly the case with Bell's palsy, which is also called idiopathic peripheral facial paralysis ("idiopathic" being a medical term that means "of unknown cause"). Since between 60 and 90 percent of all patients with this illness recover by themselves within a matter of months, the last treatment prescribed usually receives the credit. As you might imagine, the number of medications used is almost countless. Your husband is to be congratulated for sticking to Vitamin B. While it is guestionable that Vitamin B does any good in this case, at least it doesn't make things worse.

I presume, of course, that possible precipitating factors such as a diseased molar tooth have been excluded, and that your physician is aware of surgical techniques that deserve consideration in some cases.

My brother has been afflicted with pernicious anemia for many years. He has been treated by a reputable local physician who has been giving him injections of Vitamin B-12 about every three weeks. But this treatment has not arrested his disease. He is progressively getting worse. He can't express himself clearly and has lost his sense of balance to the point where walking is almost impossible.

Would an increase in the amount of B-12 or injections of folic acid help? Do you know of any clinic, doctor, or hospital in this country specializing in this disease?--M.D.



Your letter demonstrates that nothing in medicine is ever 100 percent. Therefore, as in your brother's case, a certain percentage of patients with his condition may lose their response to Vitamin B-12. Your thinking about a change in the dosage of B-12, or addition of folic acid, Vitamin B-12 seems to be along the right lines. But before changing the treatment, and pernicious it is important to review the diagnosis. Any doctor who specializes in anemia hematology should be able to help your brother.

Our baby is 18 months old. We'd like a vitamin supplement for him, but we don't want anything with artificial colors, ingredients, preservatives, etc. Our pediatrician isn't into health foods or preventive medicine. He recommended a fluoride vitamin, but I requested one without fluoride. He then recommended Vi-Daylin drops. What is your opinion of this vitamin supplement?--Mrs. J.P.



Why would you like a vitamin supplement for your baby? Since your letter indicated you are appropriately avoiding artificial additives and preservatives, I presume your baby was breastfed. Indeed, I hope you still are nursing him.

Why supplement

I recommend against supplementary vitamins in general and against baby's diet fluoridated vitamins in particular for breastfed babies. Some pediatriwith vitamins? cians favor Vitamin D and additional fluorides, but this view is in conflict with the authoritative opinion of the medical advisors to La Leche League.

> As far as babies who were never breastfed are concerned, there is no good scientific information on the type and amount of supplementary

vitamins they should take. In the absence of scientific information, your pediatrician may have to admit that any advice he gives may be based exclusively on the promotional claims of vitamin manufacturers.

According to Donald R. Davis, PhD, of the Clayton Foundation Biochem-Ear noises and ical Institute, University of Texas at Austin, one symptom of chronic Vitamin A toxicity is ear noises (Osteopathic Medicine, October 1978).

Vitamin A

A long-term (20-year) study by Northwestern University researchers may reduce has revealed that eating carrots or dark-green leafy vegetables such as cancer risk spinach may reduce the risk of lung cancer in men who smoke cigarettes.

More than 2,100 men employed at Western Electric Company in Chicago between the ages of 40 and 55 were studied. The researchers concluded that a diet which is "relatively high" in provitamin A (carotene) "may reduce the risk of cancer, even among persons who have smoked cigarettes for many years." Most cases of cancer occurred among heavy smokers who had a low carotene diet, and cancer was comparatively rare in heavy smokers who ate a lot of carotene.

Maybe doctors will discover that lung cancer has just as much to do with nutrition as with smoking. Maybe they will discover that this is true of cancer in general.

What is the difference between synthetic Vitamin A and natural Vitamin A? What constitutes a toxic dose of each of them? I personally know people who have consumed large amounts of natural Vitamin A and D concentrate daily for long periods of time and have suffered no ill effects. I know you can't get away doing this by using drugstore vitamins, but I have no documentation at my fingertips. Do you?--D.C.



Your point about the difference between the vitamins in drug stores and vitamins from natural sources is well-taken.

In his book, "Diet and Nutrition," Rudolph Ballentine, M.D., states: "Cases of toxicity resulting from pre-formed Vitamin A, usually taken as Natural vs. capsules of a concentrated supplement, rather than in animal foods, have artificial been described in children and adults in both acute and chronic forms." vitamins He further states: "... the untoward results were produced by giving pre-formed Vitamin A (retinol), and there is no indication that there is any risk whatever as long as one's source of Vitamin A is beta carotene (i.e., vegetable foods)."

> Practically the only cases of Vitamin A poisoning which we pediatricians see result from synthetic vitamins which are prescribed for children. Many of these cases may result from the tendency of doctors to believe that artificial is the same as natural: i.e., x-rays produced by machine are the same as x-rays produced by nature, fluoride added to water is the same as fluoride occurring naturally, and synthetic thyroid hormone is the same as that produced by your own thyroid gland.

Your recent answer to a reader's inquiry about the toxicity of "natural" vs. "synthetic" Vitamin A supplements could easily give the very incorrect impression that there is little or no risk from "natural" sources of Vitamin A.

Actual (preformed) Vitamin A can be toxic, and it makes no difference whether it is natural or synthetic. On the other hand, carotene and other "provitamins" A which our bodies may convert to Vitamin A are

apparently not toxic, but again it makes no difference whether these substances are natural or synthetic. The important distinction is between actual Vitamin A and something our bodies may convert to Vitamin A.

As mentioned in my enclosed review, "Using Vitamin A Safely" (Osteopathic Medicine, October 1978), a good fraction of all cases of reported toxicity have resulted from use of natural sources--capsules or liquids derived from fish livers, or meals of polar bear liver. These are the most commonly used sources of "natural" Vitamin A supplements. You are correct that the provitamins as found in vegetables are not toxic, but these are not commonly used in supplements. Therefore, unless your readers are careful to select only the uncommon provitamin A type of supplement (e.g., carotene), they should be advised to be equally careful with the usual natural or synthetic supplements.

Although it is true that some or most individuals may notice no adverse effects from very large doses of Vitamin A, sensitive adults have reported serious toxicity from amounts as low as 90,000 IU/day for prolonged periods. A common recommendation is to limit chronic doses to 25,000 or 50,000 IU/day in adults. The Recommended Dietary Allowance is 5,000 IU/day for adults.--D.D., PhD, Department of Chemistry, the University of Texas at Austin



Thank you for clarifying to my readers the question of natural vs. synthetic Vitamin A.

Readers should know that you, together with four other eminent researchers, are responsible for a landmark study showing that nutritional supplements, including megavitamins, can substantially raise the I.Q.'s of children with Down's syndrome (mongolism) and other forms of mental retardation. In this double-blind controlled study, published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, January 1981, the children who received supplements increased their average I.Q. by 5.0 to 9.6 points, whereas the I.Q.'s of children given placebos (inert substances) showed no change. Continuation of the experiment resulted in three of four children with mongolism gaining between 10 and 25 points in I.Q. The investigators call for further research through more extensive experimentation.

My sister has just found out that her newborn daughter has Down's syndrome. Since I know very little about this condition, I wonder if you could refer me to books that deal with how to raise a Down's syndrome baby in a supportive, positive way. I believe every baby should be given every possible advantage, babies like my sister's being no exception. I want to find books that will help our whole family develop this baby to her fullest potential.

Would you also know of organizations that help parents deal with this condition?--A.W.



Syndrome

It would be easy for me to answer your question by recommending that you ask your own doctor, or your local chapter of the National Association for Retarded Children, or your United Fund. But I presume you are writing me so that I can direct you toward important approaches that may be some-Nutritional what off the beaten path. Therefore, I recommend you contact the intersupplements nationally renowned authority, Henry Turkel, M.D., of Southfield, Michigan. for Down's For decades, Dr. Turkel has scientifically documented nutritional methods which not only can improve the intelligence and performance of Down's syndrome children, but which can even alter, for the better, their physical appearance and cell chromosomal structure!

Contact Ruth Harrell, M.D., of Old Dominion University, Norfolk,

Virginia, or Donald Davis, PhD, of the University of Texas Medical School at Austin. Just a few months ago, Dr. Harrell and Dr. Davis stunned the medical world with their controlled experiments which demonstrated remarkable improvement in intellectual function of retarded children (including those with Down's syndrome) who were treated with nutritional supplements. Read also the evidence that mongolism is caused by exposure to medical and dental radiation. This information has been collected by Canadian medical researcher Irene A. Uchida in "Population Genetics" (Academic Press). Many parents reject the word "mongolism" in favor of Down's syndrime. To my way of thinking, the newer term might better be "Up's syndrome" because, in contrast to the present dominant medical approach of amniocentesis and abortion, the pathways I have just recommended offer plenty of upbeat optimism, both in terms of prevention and treatment.

Vitamin E When I once asked for suggestions from women who have solved the eases problem of painful intercourse following hysterectomy without having painful to resort to estrogens, I received this advice from a lady in Tucson: intercourse

"I also had a complete hysterectomy and used estrogen creams, but became concerned about the danger of cancer from these drugs after I read some articles on the subject. So I started taking Vitamin E--a large initial dose which my doctor and I eventually adjusted to a more moderate dose. I found the Vitamin E, plus petroleum jelly, to be of help."

Sugar-coated

A researcher at the University of California reports 50 percent vitamins can't of all sugar-coated, hard-shelled vitamins are useless because they always be cannot be digested. Such sugar-coated vitamins now make up three-fourths digested of all the vitamins presently on the market.

Dr. Orville Miller, professor of pharmacy at the University of California, points out these vitamin manufacturers apply a waterproofing substance to vitamin tablets before they put on the sugar coating. The purpose of the waterproofing is to keep the syrupy sugar coating from seeping into the vitamin core. However, the waterproofing substance frequently adheres to the vitamins, preventing them from being completely absorbed by the digestive system. The best way to utilize vitamins in a pill, Dr. Miller notes, is to chew the pill thoroughly.

"MalePractice: How Doctors Manipulate Women," Dr. Mendelsohn's latest book, is now available in paperback from Contemporary Books (\$6.95).

"Confessions of a Medical Heretic" is available from WarnerBooks (\$3.25).

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The People's Doctor Newsletter P.O. Box 982 Evanston, Illinois 60204

Published monthly. Subscription rate: \$24.00 annually. Robert S. Mendelsohn, MD, Editor Vera Chatz, Associate Editor

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by Marian Tompson Executive Director, Alternative Birth Crisis Coalition



While I have been taking vitamins for several years, I periodically find myself questioning whether or not this expenditure of money is really necessary or beneficial. Is it perhaps just evidence I've become a member of the "pill popping" generation?

I have read widely on nutrition and health, and I have discussed vitamins with physicians and nutritionists whose knowledge I respect. Yet their disagreement on this issue leaves me confused and unsettled, probably even interfering with the absorption of the vitamins I do take!

This time, I phoned Hugh Riordan, M.D., of Witchita, Kansas. A long-time friend, Dr. Riordan is director of the Olive W. Garvey Center for Improvement of Human Functioning. People from all over who have thorny health problems come to the center when all else has failed. One of the diagnostic tools they use precisely measures vitamin activity in relation to enzyme systems in the human body, and this measure gives a pretty accurate indication of the amounts of particular vitamins in a person's system.

I know that Dr. Riordan prescribes vitamins when they are needed. But does he think that the average person without a particular problem should take supplemental vitamins?

"It's true that if you eat three well-balanced meals daily which contain lots of fresh vegetables, fruits and grains, if you don't drink coffee or smoke cigarettes, if you stay away from refined sugar and flour, and if you live in an unpolluted environment, you might not need supplementation. But it's difficult in today's world to get even the recommended daily allowance," Dr. Riordan explained. "There have been a number of studies in which people kept track of everything they ate for a week, and this information was then fed into a computer. A large proportion was found to be deficient in all or most of the vitamins and minerals being studied. Then if they got sick or found themselves in a stressful situation, these people wouldn't have reserves to draw on."

However, the amount of vitamin supplement each of us needs remains a puzzle. Take Vitamin C, for example. The recommended daily allowance is 60 mg. Yet, Dr. Riordan relates that, in raising guinea pigs for laboratory use, it is accepted that these animals need 60 mg of Vitamin C per kilogram of body weight each day just to stay healthy. The guinea pigs need twice as much Vitamin C if they are to reproduce. Based on this formula, for a 150 pound human, 3,150 mg of Vitamin C would be required each day, rather than 60. While we question whether animal studies are directly transferable to humans, it still makes one think.

Nowadays, many people are consciously cutting down on their salt intake, but iodized salt may well be their chief source of iodine. So if they live in the goiter belt and begin to limit their salt intake, they also should increase their intake of iodine-rich foods such as seafood or kelp. There is research which shows that, by taking a multivitamin mineral preparation for a month before she becomes pregnant, a woman reduces the chances of central nervous system defects in her infant.

"Vitamins are naturally-occurring essential nutrients," sums up Dr. Riordan. "At the center, we recommend that people in our personal health control program take a multivitamin mineral supplement for a few weeks to see how they feel. Usually they report feeling a surge of energy and wellbeing. If it has no effect, or if they feel worse, they can stop."

That makes sense, and I'm going to take my vitamins--at least for now.