



CONCIERGE MEDICINE:

AN APPLE A DAY? CAN DISEASE PREVENTION REALLY BE THAT SIMPLE?

HOUSE CALL

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Well-meaning patients often arrive for appointments loaded with goodies: an array of liquid nutritional supplements, protein supplements, vitamins and minerals, and water laced with vitamins. Patients want my professional opinion of these products. The bad news is that not only are these items pricey, they are also potentially harmful. The good news is that disease prevention is far easier than you may imagine.

FIRST, LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT VITAMIN USE.

Clearly, patients are concerned about their health. They want to believe that vitamin products will help prevent the diseases they fear most: cancer, heart disease, stroke, and dementia. Advertisers prey on these fears, promising good health and the hope of longevity with the use of vitamin products. Scientific studies, however, have proven otherwise. The United States Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF), founded by the U.S. government to evaluate the benefit of many services and treatments in the prevention of diseases, states the following in their clinical guidelines on routine supplementation to prevent cancer and cardiovascular disease:

"The evidence is insufficient to recommend for or against the use of supplements of vitamins A, C, or E; multivitamins with folic acid; or antioxidant combinations for the prevention of cancer and cardiovascular disease...The USPSTF recommends against the use of Beta-carotene supplements, either alone or in combination, for the prevention of cancer and cardiovascular disease."

The scientific evidence for the USPSTF's conclusions should not be taken lightly. Its task force-comprised of over a dozen experts on nutrition and epidemiology-reviewed hundreds of studies, trials, and journal articles to arrive at its conclusions.

BUT WHAT DO THESE SCIENTIFIC CONCLUSIONS MEAN FOR YOU, THE PATIENT?

The next time you hear anti-oxidant vitamins touted on TV and radio infomercials as panaceas, remember there is little scientific evidence to support these claims. In fact, Beta-carotene has been shown in two large trials of heavy smokers to be associated with higher inci-

dence of lung cancer and overall mortality. Furthermore, vitamins A, D, and E whether taken individually or in combinations, may be harmful in doses exceeding the Recommended Daily Allowance.

In my experience, people too often assume "if a little bit is good, then a lot is a lot better." When it comes to vitamins, nothing could be further from the truth.

On the subject of dementia as it relates to vitamin use, in a recent study in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA), high dose vitamin B-12, vitamin B-6, and folic acid were given to Alzheimer's patients over an 18-month period. The study concluded that a "regimen of high-dose B vitamin supplements does not slow cognitive decline in individuals with mild to moderate Alzheimer's Disease."

Let me be clear: taking a daily multivitamin isn't harmful and may be beneficial in preventing vitamin deficiencies. But taking vitamins cannot replace the need to eat a healthy diet. So, let's consider the good news about prevention. The USPSTF concludes:

"Although the health benefits of vitamin supplementation remain uncertain, there is more consistent evidence that a diet high in fruit, vegetables, and legumes has important benefits; other constituents besides vitamins may account for the benefit of such diets."

The so-called "constituents" in vegetables and fruits provide fiber and other crucial benefits Mother Nature seems to understand best and scientists are currently investigating.

Furthermore, the American Cancer Society recommends a well-balanced diet and "does not recommend the use of vitamin and mineral supplements as a preventative or therapeutic intervention."

In other words, an apple a day can, in fact, keep you healthier.

Since good nutrition is the cornerstone of good health, it should be everyone's top priority. In my concierge practice, a private consultation with a registered dietician is included as a membership benefit.

Now go out and pick some autumn apples. They taste great and don't even require a prescription.

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