WHY YOU SHOULD STOP TAKING YOUR SUPPLEMENTS

By Dr. Ramona Warren

Stop taking supplements? Did I actually recommend that? Yes, because MOST supplements can do more harm than good.

At first blush, it would seem that supplements are beneficial for our health. After all, we know vitamins are essential for life. We also know that a deficiency of certain vitamins can result in disease (think scurvy, which results from a vitamin C deficiency). Add to that knowledge, some of the numerous studies that have shown the benefits of taking vitamins, and it’s difficult to see how taking vitamins can be harmful.

For example, the publication *Seminars in Preventive and Alternative Medicine* wrote about a recent study that looked at over 100 studies conducted over the last 10 years and found vitamin C to be beneficial for a long list of conditions. According to one of the researchers, Mark Moyad, MD from the University of Michigan, "The more we study vitamin C, the better our understating of how diverse it is in protecting our health, from cardiovascular disease, cancer, stroke, eye health and immunity to living longer."

However, while there are many studies supporting the use of various supplements, there are just as many that draw opposite conclusions.

The American Cancer Society did a large study with smokers and vitamin A, which is an anti-oxidant believed to have the ability to fight cancer. In this study they found that smokers who took vitamin A were **more** likely to get cancer. Additionally, a recent large study done to determine if vitamin E might help reduce the risk of prostate cancer concluded there was an increased risk of cancer for men taking vitamin E.

So, the question of whether or not to supplement can be very confusing since there are many conflicting studies. However, one thing is certain -- even though Americans are spending over $25 billion dollars a year on supplements, the health of Americans continues to decline. Let’s look at some of the reasons there is such a contrast in the studies and in the opinions of health professionals regarding supplements.

First, it’s important to understand that not all supplements are created equal. Almost 90 percent of supplements on the market are synthetic and made from chemicals rather than real food (where true nutrients are found). Just as we should eat food as close to its natural state in order to improve and maintain our health, the same is true for our supplements.

Many companies boast their product is "pharmaceutical grade," however that typically means it was created in a lab and is highly processed. The body does not absorb a synthetic vitamin like it does a supplement made from whole foods. A study in *The Lancet* states, "Whole food vitamin C as found in onions and citrus fruits is able to quickly cure any case of scurvy. By contrast, the fractionated chemical ascorbic acid has been shown to be insufficient in resolving a scurvy condition, simply because it does not act as a nutrient." This explains why many of the studies out there find that supplements are not beneficial. However, when used correctly, whole food supplements can be very powerful indeed.

Here are a few steps to help make better supplement choices:

1. Supplements should be just that...a SUPPLEMENT. Most people eat poor diets and take a supplement thinking that is all they need to improve their health. Hippocrates, the father of western medicine, wrote “Let food be thy medicine.” This means we should focus on quality, REAL food, as the foundation of our diet, rather than the packaged, processed, fast food diets most Americans consume. No supplement, no matter the quality, will overcome a diet that is calorie dense and nutrient deficient.
2. Take supplements that are as close to their natural form and are extracted from whole foods. It is more difficult to find a quality whole food supplement, since most supplements that line the shelves in the grocery stores, pharmacies and even health food stores are made in labs with synthetic or isolated nutrients. A supplement from a food source is not in an isolated form. Rather, it is part of an entire complex with all the necessary factors present for optimal absorption of nutrients.
3. Look at the label. It should contain a list of real foods. When a supplement comes from a real food source you will not find a "perfect" balance of nutrients such as B-50 or B100, where all the B vitamins listed are 50 or 100 milligrams. Nature doesn't work that way.

I encourage you to stop taking supplements that are synthetically derived. However, I wholeheartedly believe that everyone can benefit from quality supplementation with the right types of supplements. Two companies I recommend that provide quality supplements from organically grown whole foods are Standard Process and Garden of Life.

If you would like a list of common synthetic vitamins to avoid, please email me at pathwaysth@gmail.com and put "Vitamins" in the subject line.