

Multi-Confusion

Q. Should we all be taking a multivitamin?

“Take a multivitamin for insurance” is what we’ve been hearing for so many years, until now. A handful of studies have suggested that people who take multivitamins – or a few of nutrients they contain – might actually have a slightly higher risk of cancer. Now, more conclusive evidence is needed but it’s enough to rethink your multi.

Q. What are the nutrients here that are in question?

Folic Acid: Some studies are showing that, taking a multivitamin with *high* amounts of folate or folic acid, slightly increases your risk of prostate, breast, and colon cancers.

Recommendations: Limit folic acid to 400mcg (0.4mg).
 (London Drugs Silver for Adults over 55 has 600mcg)
 Premenopausal women (women in childbearing years) need 400mcg/day.
 Men and Postmenopausal Women are better off with a multi with < 400mcg (if
 you can find one) OR take your regular multi every other day.

Selenium: Limit Selenium to 100mcg - some studies have shown that 200mcg a day may raise the risk of skin cancer and diabetes, and pending a current study looking at increase risk of prostate cancer.

Iron: Many multivitamins, especially those geared to men or senior women, have no iron because a few studies have suggested that iron may raise the risk of heart disease and cancers. But, then evidence is thin. Men and postmenopausal women do need 8mg of iron a day, especially if they eat little red meat, or donate blood regularly.

Recommendation: Men and Post-menopausal women - take a multi with 8mg of iron.
 Pre-menopausal women need 18 mg of iron a day (Multi 14-18mg/day).

Vitamin D: A few multivitamins (Jamieson Adult 50+ Vita-Vim, Centrum Advantage, and Life Spectrum Advanced) have bumped their vitamin D from 400 to 800 IU, and more are sure to follow. Women who take calcium supplements with Vitamin D may want less than 800IU in their multi, but 800IU might be attractive to men, who may not be taking a separate supplement with calcium plus D.

Recommendation: Everyone needs 800IU Vitamin D each day.
 Add up the vitamin D in all of your vitamins and ensure that you’re not getting
 over 1000IU per day.

Calcium: In general, don’t rely on a multivitamin to get your calcium, most can’t pack enough in. Men should choose a multivitamin with no more than 200mg

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. *Does more expensive mean better quality?*

A. No. You can buy a month's worth of a high-quality multivitamin for roughly \$2-\$5. Double that if you take your calcium and vitamin D separately.

Q. *Does it matter when I take my multivitamin?*

A. Some nutrients are better absorbed when your digestive tract is geared up for handling food, so it's probably best to take your multi with meals.

Q. *Are natural vitamins better than synthetic?*

A. No. The one exception is natural vitamin E; it's twice as potent as synthetic vitamin E. Check the ingredient list. Natural vitamin E is d-alpha tocopherol. Synthetic vitamin E is dl-alpha tocopherol.

Q. *Are the additives in multivitamins safe?*

A. There's been no reason to think that the small amounts of fillers, binders, flavor agents, and preservatives in most multivitamins are harmful.

Dietitian's Multivitamin Recommendations

My suggestion: Before you select a multivitamin, sit down with a Dietitian, have someone take a look at your diet and your individual health needs. You may not even need one!

There are a lot of good quality products out there. This list is by no means inclusive, but here are some quality multivitamins that we can find in most stores.

Men & Postmenopausal Women (take every other day):

- ✓ Bayer one a day for men
- ✓ Equate one tablet daily men's formula
- ✓ Exact Vital 1 Men's Formula
- ✓ Life Daily – One Active
- ✓ Life Daily – One men's formula
- ✓ Safeway Select Men's formula
- ✓ Any of the following multivitamins for Premenopausal Women

Premenopausal Women (take every day):

- ✓ Compliments One Tablet Daily
- ✓ Life Daily – One Weight sense
- ✓ Rexall One Weigh
- ✓ Safeway Select Weight-Conscious

Note: The above listed multivitamins meet the latest recommendations from Canadian and US scientists at the Institute of Medicine (IOM). For more information visit: www.iom.edu.