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War on Integrative Medicine, Part Two: Eliminate Supplements

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Why are the attacks on supplements becoming so loud?

By now anyone not living in a cave has heard the message loud and clear: don't use supplements. Either they are a harmless waste of money, or they're a harmful threat to your health (note that these points are contradictory). This message has been repeated over and over both in journals and in conventional media outlets. It is, with very few exceptions, junk science. Even in the few instances when it is right, it is wrong.

Here's an example of what we mean by being right and wrong at the same time. Journals and the media keep insisting on calling alpha-tocopherol "vitamin E." This is incorrect.

Vitamin E [is comprised of](#) ^[1] mixed tocopherols and tocotrienols. Too much alpha-tocopherol [can interfere with](#) ^[2] your body's use of the arguably more important gamma form. Hence studies that supplement alpha alone and call it vitamin E are both inaccurate and doing something that does not occur in nature. In addition, in most instances the alpha-tocopherol being tested is dl-alpha-tocopherol, which is the fully synthetic form, also not something you will ever find in nature.

Similarly, studies suggesting there is a heart risk associated with supplementing calcium are both right and wrong. They are right because calcium needs some essential co-factors to move into the bones instead of the circulatory system. These include vitamin K2 in particular, along with vitamin D3 and other less important factors. This is one reason (among others) why the World Health Organization's [2010 proposal to put calcium in the water supply](#) ^[3] was simply crazy.

Another way to be right and wrong simultaneously is to use a tiny bit of a supplement and say that it had no measurable effect. This is spending a great deal of money in order to state what should have been obvious. There is no point studying supplements if you don't test meaningful doses. To do this, you have to do what researchers least want to do: actually consult with integrative doctors, the people with clinical experience using supplements.

Not understanding co-factors and proper dosages is perhaps excusable. The other tricks used to make supplements look dangerous are really dubious: the intentional cherry picking of studies, most of them with very questionable data, followed by all kinds of "clever" statistical manipulations, among other underhanded techniques.

For example, if you are allowed to see the underlying data (often not the case) and dig into it deeply enough, you find that people using supplements lived longer. But the researchers then "corrected" for lifestyle habits (e.g., diet), throwing in as many factors as they liked, until they could force the remaining data into a weak statistical result that now seemed to say the supplements actually *hurt*. Why does the researcher bother to go to all this trouble when he or she clearly had already decided on the answer?

Recently, more and more researchers have been going to more and more trouble to find evidence—any evidence, no matter how weak or falsified—to shore up conclusions they have already reached. Why? And why have reporters more or less done the opposite, going to no trouble at all, just parroting press releases? In the latter case, it can't just be laziness.

This increasing phenomenon of underhanded attacks amplified mindlessly by the mass press suggests that the natural health idea, based on diet and lifestyle, not just supplements, must be reaching people. This seems to be a campaign of push-back, and it is getting bigger and bigger.

There is the old story about how new ideas emerge. First, they are scoffed at: "What a complete joke!" As the ideas advance, the entrenched interests who benefit from the old ideas lapse into a stony silence: "Shh! Don't let any more people hear about this!" In phase three, there is a very vocal campaign of push-back from the entrenched interests.

Stage three seems to be where we are at now. Do you know how to tell we have reached the final, fourth stage, the stage in which the new ideas are finally accepted? It is when the former opponents of the new ideas say, "Oh, we knew that all along!"

During our current third stage of vocal attack on natural health, one of the oft-heard arguments against supplements is, "Hey, just eat well. You can get everything you need from food." That seems reasonable. It at least nods in the direction of natural health ideas, because we do believe that diet is vital. But it is wrong, for a number of reasons.

Studies suggest that Americans are short of many essential nutrients. Dr. Bruce Ames, emeritus professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at the University of California at Berkeley, [points out](#) ^[4] that 60% of Americans get too little magnesium, one of our most important nutrients. Magnesium alone is needed for over 300 biochemical reactions, according to the Life Extension Foundation. Dr. Ames estimates that not getting enough of the right nutrients in general is shortening the average lifespan by eight to ten years.

Partly this is because many of us don't eat well. But there are numerous other reasons why we might not get sufficient nutrients from food alone. One of them is conventional medical treatment, especially medical mistakes. One of the gravest mistakes of modern medicine appears to be blocking the acid in people's stomachs in the mistaken belief that this will control acid reflux or stomach pain over the long run.

As we have often pointed out, the evidence has always existed that people lose stomach acid as they age and it is often [the lack of acid](#) ^[5] that contributes both to reflux and stomach pain. Even the FDA has only authorized the use of acid blockers for short periods of time. Yet doctors routinely prescribe them for years.

And what does the lack of stomach acid lead to—in addition to [steadily worsening stomach problems](#) ^[6] for millions of sufferers? [Malnutrition](#) ^[7], of course (one example of which is vitamin B12 [deficiency](#) ^[8]). How can we properly digest protein and especially minerals without the acid that is supposed to be in our stomachs? And don't forget pneumonia: lack of acid lets the bugs through and [has been shown by creditable researchers](#) ^[9] to lead to more serious illness and even death. The culprit is often [the class of gastric acid-suppressing drugs known as PPIs](#) ^[10], or proton pump inhibitors, like Nexium and Prevacid, among the most widely prescribed drugs in the US, with nearly [110 million prescriptions](#) ^[11] and \$13.9 billion in sales in 2010, in addition to over-the-counter sales. In other words, a huge number of Americans are malnourished from PPIs alone.

Think about a doctor who both prescribes acid blockers for years and tells his patient not to take supplements. He or she may be literally starving the patient to death, however many years it takes to play out. Other drugs may also interfere with nutrition in ways that are barely understood, and surgical trauma certainly requires extra nutrients to heal.

[In our next article](#) ^[12], we'll cover some particularly egregious recent attacks on supplements coming both from a medical journal published by—who else—the American Medical Association and amplified by the mainstream media.

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URLs in this post:

[1] is comprised of: <http://www.fitday.com/fitness-articles/nutrition/healthy-eating/the-difference-between-tocopherol-and-tocotrienol.html#b>

[2] can interfere with: <http://www.anh-usa.org/are-antioxidant-supplements-such-as-vitamin-c-harmful/>

[3] 2010 proposal to put calcium in the water supply: <http://www.anh-usa.org/fluoride-is-not-enough%E2%80%94now-they-want-to-add-calcium-to-our-drinking-water/>

[4] points out: http://www.lef.org/magazine/mag2011/aug2011_Interview-with-Dr-Bruce-Ames_01

[5] the lack of acid: <http://www.anh-usa.org/are-big-pharmas-drugs-making-your-heartburn-worse-and-worse-just-fix-it-with-surgery/>

[6] steadily worsening stomach problems: <http://www.anh-usa.org/stomach-trouble-too-little-acid/>

[7] Malnutrition: http://www.lef.org/magazine/mag2006/mar2006_report_drugs_01.htm

[8] deficiency: <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/b-12-deficiency/>

[9] has been shown by credible researchers: <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=199650>

[10] the class of gastric acid-suppressing drugs known as PPIs: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/15507580>

[11] 110 million prescriptions: <http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/25/combating-acid-reflux-may-bring-host-of-ills/>

[12] In our next article: <http://www.anh-usa.org/public-junk-science/>

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