

Vitamin supplements can be helpful — and harmful

By Kathryn Reitler

Of the Emerald

Many health enthusiasts would have one believe that vitamins prevent the common cold, protect against heart disease and cancer, delay old age and even offset the ill effects of stress.

But many health experts are warning consumers to be aware that their daily multivitamin supplements could endanger their health.

Excess vitamins

"I was sick all the time so I took vitamins, but I only became sicker," said Jodi Styles, a part-time University student. "It's a vicious circle, but what can you do?"

A later physician's exam revealed that Styles' sickness was caused by a vitamin A overdose.

Americans are finding themselves bombarded with messages to stay fit; everywhere one looks, people are running, biking, exercising.

And as health and fitness have become more popular, so have vitamin supplements.

"There is a reason for this," said Ray Gladstone, a Pay Less Drug Store pharmacist. "I see many kinds of people in this business, especially those who look at health magazines and then come to me for vitamin supplements. Most vitamins are marginally effective; many of them are worthless."

Both nutritionists and doctors insist that a balanced diet supplies all the nutrients needed for good health.

"Nearly 40 percent of all Americans self-dose with one or more nutrients in multiple and single doses, in natural and synthetic formulations, and in amounts 10 or more times higher than what is recommended," Gladstone said.

According to a recent edition of the Reader's Digest, pur-

chases of vitamin supplements add up to more than \$3 billion a year.

People who doubt their diets are balanced often turn to vitamin supplements as insurance. And selective supplementation does have its place. For example, vitamins can assure dieters who get by on 1,500 calories or less per day that their systems are receiving enough nutrition.

Vitamins' effects

Vitamins can be divided into two categories: fat-soluble and water-soluble. Vitamins A, D, E and K are fat-soluble, and C and B-complex vitamins are water-soluble. Fat-soluble vitamins don't pass through the urinary tract as quickly as water-soluble vitamins do. And in large doses they can crowd the body's storehouses and become potential toxins.

Vitamin A is for development, growth and maintenance of normal skin, mucous membranes and bones. It is found in liver, butter, fortified milk products, potatoes, green leafy vegetables and yellow-orange fruits.

People deficient in Vitamin A are prone to infection and a variety of skin disorders. Toxicity, or too much Vitamin A, can cause anorexia, headaches, blurred vision, irritability, cracked and bleeding lips, nosebleeds and flaking skin.

Two large carrots contain about 22,000 International Units (IUs). The recommended maximum is 25,000 IUs per day.

Vitamin D absorbs calcium and helps build strong, healthy bones. It is easily obtained in milk and by exposure to the sun. A lack of vitamin D results in rickets, which is characterized by a softening of the bones. Children are particularly



Graphic by John Bock

susceptible to the disease.

Excess intake of vitamin D causes nausea, headache, weakness, fatigue and even injury to artery walls. About one quart of milk supplies a person with the U.S. Recommended Daily Allowance of 300-400

Vitamin E has been called a "vitamin in search of a disease," Gladstone said, because there is no known adult disorder that can be traced to vitamin E deficiency. Appropriate dosage is about 30 IUs

for adults.

Vitamin K aids blood clotting. An excess causes jaundice, yellowing of the skin, in newborns.

Vitamin B works to make and repair tissue, and to replenish hormones. Vitamin B deficiency causes beriberi, a condition rarely seen in the United States, characterized by partial paralysis of the extremities, emaciation and anemia. The Recommended Daily Allowance of vitamin B is 20 milligrams.

Vitamin C helps heal wounds, build red blood cells, and maintain bones, teeth, skin, tendons and certain hormones. Deficiency causes scurvy, a disease marked by weakness and anemia. This disease also is rare in the United States because vitamin C is widely available.

Eight ounces of orange juice contain 60 milligrams of vitamin C, which is enough for most adults. More can cause abdominal cramps and nausea.

Avoiding trouble

"Alcoholics are a great majority of those who have deficiencies," said Dr. Jackson, director of the University Student Health Center. "They lack thiamin and folic acid."

Athletes also are prone to deficiency and toxicity, Jackson said. "They live off the notion that as far as supplements go, a lot is good, more is better," he said.

One former athlete, Bob Wilks, recalled what too much vitamin D did to him. "I developed kidney stones," he said. "It was like an alien invading my body, and in fact it was. I could have died."

"It all boils down to the buyer beware," Gladstone said. He advises people to ask themselves if they really need vitamin supplements; and to know what they're taking off the shelves.

People taking supplements should follow these guidelines:

- The safest and most practical insurance against vitamin deficiency and toxicity is to eat a good, balanced diet through the foods you eat, not pills.

- If your diet is haphazard and unbalanced, a multivitamin can be used in moderation.

- Never take vitamins in doses higher than the Recommended Daily Allowance.

- Promptly see a doctor if a deficiency is suspected.

Strike Continued from Page 1

president set the pattern for corporate handling of major strikes... during the first half of this decade," wrote University sociology Professor David Milton in his recent article, "Late Capitalism and the Decline of Trade Union Power in the United States."

Professor Jim Gallagher of the University's Labor Education and Research Center, echoes Milton. "The crushing of the (Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization) strike was so blatant and harsh, it sent an encouraging message to anti-union employers, and en-

couraged those on the fence to take a harder position."

Two other factors have added woes to labor unions in their battle to stay healthy, Gallagher said.

The deep recession at the beginning of the decade compromised labor because unemployment tends to weaken labor by making it more readily replaceable. And the labor movement also was hurt by the hundreds of thousands of jobs lost in its most highly organized sector, manufacturing, he said.

Trends nationwide have shown a steady slip in the

labor's popularity rating, Gallagher said.

"There has been a growing misconception as to labor's power. It's a not infrequently held view that labor has too much power," he said.

Milton's article cited a recent poll in California, "a traditionally strong labor state, (which) revealed that 44 percent of Californians believe unions do more harm than good."

Gallagher said he is unaware of any polls of public attitudes toward unions in Oregon or in areas where Weyerhaeuser

workers are striking, but he believes attitudes in these areas may be more supportive of unions.

"If wage rollbacks come about and the profit-sharing plan doesn't make up the difference, it will have an important, maybe devastating effect on the local economies," he said. "Absent any profit-sharing, we're talking about the effect on local businesses of losing 20-25 percent of all timber-related jobs."

"Economically, Eugene, Springfield and Cottage Grove have a terribly important stake in these negotiations. That is not passing judgment on the equity of Weyerhaeuser's demands, but simply speaking to the economic effect," Gallagher said.

Labor unions on the national and local levels, realizing the importance of public opinion, have been attempting to brighten their images through media advertisements and public relations campaigns.

Local television has been carrying union-sponsored instructions by Vicky Lawrence and "Mama," who advocates support for unions and boycotts.

The July 3 New York Times carried a full-page ad from the Independent Federation of Flight Attendants calling for a boycott of Trans World Airlines. The airline fired nearly 6,000 IFFA strikers and hired younger, inexperienced workers to fill their jobs.

"The unions should use TV — they legitimize themselves," said University political science Professor Jim Klonoski.

Professors do not identify with the working class and tend to believe they don't need unions but can make better livings on their own, Klonoski said. Portland State University is the only major state university with an organized faculty union.

Nevertheless, "most professors still would not walk through picket lines, and some are even more radical than most people," Klonoski said.

Students' attitudes tend to be more similar to "the yuppies who've come into being in the '60s and '70s," Klonoski said.

"Tektronix Inc. (a Beaverton-based high-tech firm), is laying off thousands of workers, and yet they won't unionize," Klonoski said.

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