

# HEALTH

## Worried about the Safety of Vitamins?

### Health experts offer advice

(AP) -- Two studies last week raised gnawing worries about the safety of vitamin supplements and a host of questions. Should anyone be taking them? Which ones are most risky? And if you do take them, how can you pick the safest ones?

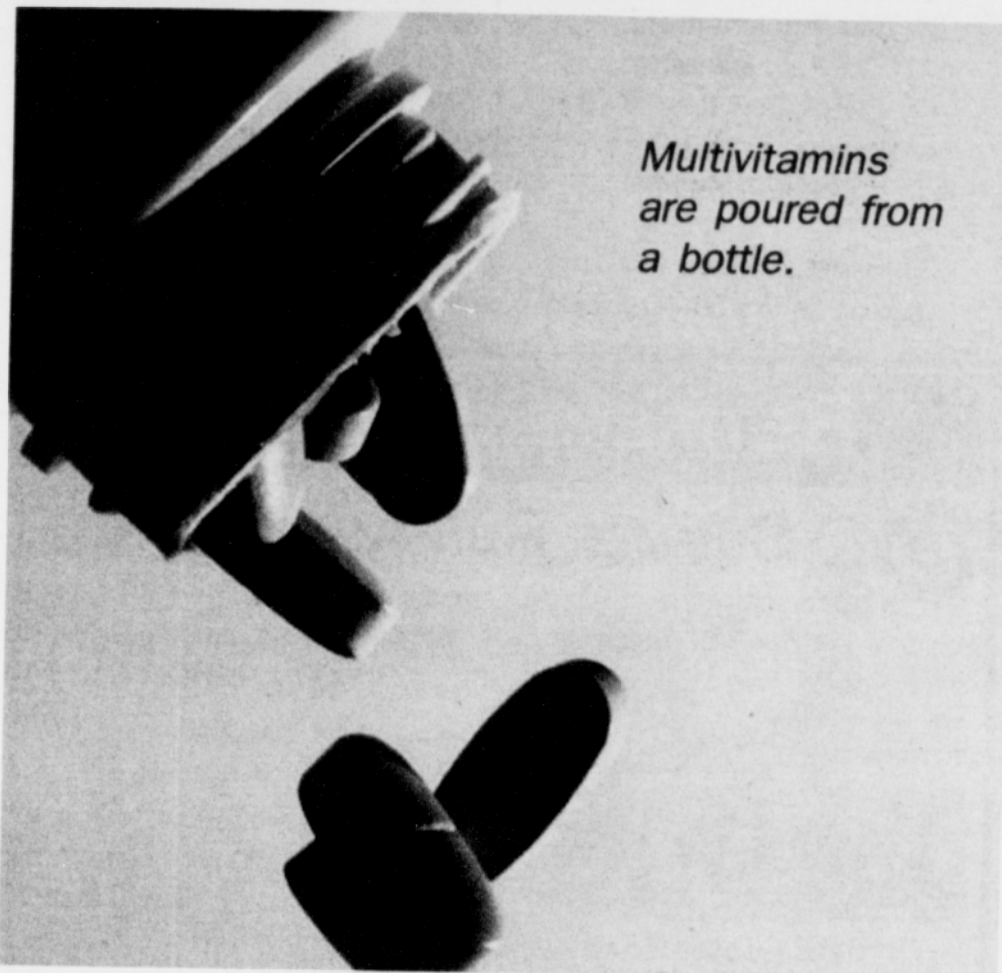
Vitamins have long had a "health halo." Many people think they're good for you and at worst might simply be unnecessary. The industry calls them an insurance policy against bad eating.

But our foods are increasingly pumped full of them already. Even junk foods and drinks often are fortified with nutrients to give them a healthier profile, so the risk is rising that we're getting too much. Add a supplement and you may exceed the upper limit.

"We're finding out they're not as harmless as the industry might have us believe," said David Schardt, a nutritionist at the consumer group Center for Science in the Public Interest.

Last week, a study of nearly 40,000 older women found a slightly higher risk of death among those taking dietary supplements, including multivitamins, folic acid, iron and copper. It was just an observational study, though, not a rigorous test.

Another study found that men



Multivitamins are poured from a bottle.

taking high doses of vitamin E — 400 units a day — for five years had a slightly increased risk of prostate cancer.

As many as one-third of Americans take vitamins, and nearly half of people 50 and older take multivitamins, surveys suggest. Americans spent \$9.6 billion on vitamins last year, up from \$7.2 billion in 2005. Multivitamins top the list at nearly \$5 billion in sales.

Yet there is no clear evidence that multivitamins lower the risk of cancer, heart disease or any other chronic health problems. No government agency recommends

them "regardless of the quality of a person's diet," says a fact sheet from the federal Office of Dietary Supplements. And vitamins aren't required to undergo the strict testing required of U.S.-approved prescription medicines.

Some fads, such as the antioxidant craze over vitamins A and E and beta-carotene, backfired when studies found more health risk, not less. And studies that find more

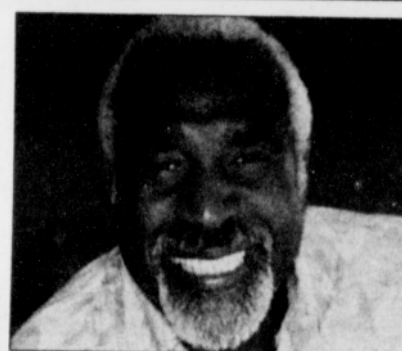
disease in people with too little of a certain vitamin can be misleading: Correcting a deficiency so you have the right daily amount is different from supplementing beyond recommended levels.

The best way to get vitamins is to eat foods that naturally contain them, said Jody Engel, a nutritionist with Office of Dietary Supplements. "Foods provide more than

just vitamins and minerals, such as fiber and other ingredients that may have positive health effects."

Schardt adds: "It's virtually impossible to overdose on the nutrients in food."

Some folks may need more of certain nutrients and should talk with their doctors about supplements, such as calcium and vitamin D.



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## Local HIV/AIDS Services Boosted

The Portland Housing Bureau has received \$1.4 million in new funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to fund a variety of housing services, including short-term rent assistance, employment services, and permanent housing for people living with HIV and experiencing homelessness.

This new funding will provide homes for up to 60 more people living with HIV/AIDS per year and connect them to employment opportunities. More than 600 people living with HIV/AIDS are experiencing homelessness, or on the

brink of becoming homeless in the Portland metropolitan area, officials said.

Seventy percent of people living with HIV/AIDS have incomes below the federal poverty level. Lack of employment and benefits income presents a major barrier to securing housing.

The new funding will support the work of Cascade AIDS Project in providing rent assistance, case management and employment services, with the employment and training services offered at WorkSource Portland Metro funded by Worksystems, Inc.

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