High-Dose Vitamins Don’t Fight HIV and Can Raise Liver Levels

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A large study has found that high doses of multivitamin supplements fail to combat HIV and may raise liver levels in those also taking antiretrovirals (ARVs), aidsmap reports. Researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health published the results of their randomized, double-blind, controlled trial in The Journal of the American Medical Association.

The Harvard team recruited 3,418 HIV-positive people in seven clinics in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, who were beginning ARV treatment between November 2006 and November 2008. Participants took daily oral supplements of either the recommended daily allowance of vitamin B complex, vitamin C and vitamin E, or between two and 21 times the dose of B vitamins, twice the dose of vitamin C and six times that of vitamin E.

The study was halted early, in March 2009, because patients taking the high vitamin doses experienced elevated alanine transaminase (ALT) levels—which is an indication of liver damage. At that time, 3,418 people were still enrolled in the study for a median 15 months. High-dose vitamins had no effect on CD4 count, viral load, body mass index, mortality, or the risk of the blood disorders anemia and neutropenia. However, 38 percent of participants in the high-dose arm experienced ALT levels that were elevated five times or greater than the upper limits of normal. Only 2 percent of those in the standard-dose arm experienced such elevations.
The researchers noted that previous studies have shown that high doses of vitamins are safe for HIV-positive people, but because of “potential negative interactions among nutrients and antiretrovirals” the study authors advised those on ARVs to only take the standard dose of multivitamins.

To read the aidsmap report, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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