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Vitamin cocktail cuts cancer deaths



Supplement had a dramatic effect

A dietary supplement of vitamins and minerals may help to slash the risk of cancer, research has found.

The supplement contained the same levels of antioxidant nutrients found in a diet rich in fruit and vegetables.

Antioxidants help to mop up highly reactive molecules called free radicals which can cause damage to the body's tissues.

Researchers say their work - the SuViMax study - provides compelling evidence of the importance of a healthy diet.

“ There is reason to believe that the effect would be less than that of dietary sources of antioxidants, particularly fruit and vegetables, which provide other protective substances

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Scientific and Technical
Institute for Nutrition and Diet

Scientists in France gave the supplement to thousands of men and women over a seven year period, and found cancer rates were cut by almost a third.

A total of 13,000 men and women aged 35 to 60 took part in the study.

Half were given a daily supplement containing 6mg of beta-carotene, 120mg of vitamin C, 90mg of vitamin E, 100 micrograms of selenium, and 20 milligrams of zinc.

A dummy capsule was given to the other participants.

Over a seven-and-a-half year follow-up period, 103 men and 71 women died.

Effect on men

Cancer, which affected 562 volunteers, was the major cause of death while heart disease afflicted 271.

In total, 56 men and 47 women died from various kinds of cancer while heart disease claimed the lives of 28 men and five women.

Taking the supplement had no effect on heart disease, and did

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not influence cancer rates in women.

But the scientists said a 31% reduction in the risk of all cancers was seen in men taking the antioxidants.

And, overall, the death rate was 37% lower among men who took the supplement.

The researchers, led by Dr Serge Hercberg, from the Scientific and Technical Institute for Nutrition and Diet in Paris, said further studies would be needed to confirm the findings.

But they add: "Even now, however, they completely support recommendations for following a healthy diet, particularly one rich in fruit and vegetables which are major dietary sources of antioxidant vitamins and minerals, for all ages in life and for both sexes."

The researchers said women may not have received the same benefits because their diet were better than those of men.

They believe that both sexes may benefit if the research was carried out in the UK, where poor diet is more widespread.

An Oxford University study a year ago which looked at vitamins C, E and beta-carotene concluded that they were a waste of money.

This was followed by a Food Standards Agency report warning that overdosing on vitamins and minerals could be harmful.

The French scientists agreed that vitamins and minerals were better obtained from fruit and vegetables.

They wrote: "There is reason to believe that the effect would be less than that of dietary sources of antioxidants, particularly fruit and vegetables, which provide other protective substances."

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