

Caveats from a Catholic Doc

My colleagues and I have presented fairly serious topics over the last several months in this column. This month I would like to try something a little different and do what doctors do all day long— give advice. I will keep it simple and to the point. My advice is backed by published research studies and is not just my opinion. Despite that, I am sure there will be those who disagree.

Let's start with what will probably be the most controversial subject I will discuss: the multi-billion dollar vitamin industry. Its goal is to sell you vitamins and make money. Study after study has shown that mega or super doses of vitamins do not enhance your health. In recent years multiple mega-B vitamin (B6, B12, folic acid) research studies have been very disappointing and proven to be of no benefit.

A large study on high dose Vitamin E has actually shown a trend toward harm. No benefit has been proven for high dose vitamin C, Echinacea, *Ginkgo biloba* and so many other supplements. The recently published PHYSICIAN HEALTH STUDY II in which over 14,000 physicians participated, showed that after 11 years of taking a popular multivitamin (Centrum Silver) there was no benefit at reducing cardiovascular disease, which was the main goal of the study. At least there was a trend toward less cancer in the vitamin group.

My advice is to avoid the super-dose and expensive vitamin supplements and consider a daily dose of a multivitamin, especially if you don't eat a healthy diet full of fruits and vegetables. Then take all the money you just saved and give it to your favorite charity. Interestingly, eating a diet high in vitamins and minerals (fruits and vegetables generally) HAS been shown to be beneficial. BUT, if you take those same vitamins and minerals at high doses and artificially put them in a pill the magic goes away!

What about alcohol? The bottom line is moderate consumption of alcohol in epidemiological studies has shown benefits, particularly reduced cardiovascular disease. Moderate consumption means 3-7 adult beverages a week (sorry, it does not mean 7 drinks in one night!). The most beneficial appears to be red wine, but white wine, various spirits, and even beer are also acceptable. Don't forget there are plenty of calories in alcohol, so you have to cut back on calorie consumption someplace else.

Finally, if you don't drink alcohol at all now, don't start because of what I just said. If drinking has caused problems in your life or you know you're an alcoholic, then avoidance is a must.

Did you know lifelong smokers live an average of 10 years less than nonsmokers? That means many smokers will not see their 70's. It's never too late to stop smoking and improve your health and prognosis.

There is an epidemic of adult onset type II diabetes in this country. A significant percentage of these people can reverse their diabetes with a simple plan—weight loss. For example, somebody that is 5' 10" and weighs 230 lbs can very likely get off all their diabetic meds if they lose weight through diet and exercise to get down to 180 lbs. For diabetics that are not at ideal body weight, the best solution is not more pills or even insulin, it is weight loss!

I suspect you have all taken notice when you have seen an 85 year old man or woman walk by with the speed and vigor of a 30 year old. Do you know what the secret is? It's exercise. If you want to enjoy your golden years, keep moving and keep exercising! I always try to end with scripture.

“Or do you not know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

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