



A large US study found that taking multivitamins does not lower the risk of developing heart disease or cancer in postmenopausal women. The pills also had no effect on the risk of early death, according to the latest study from the Women's Health Initiative, published in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* in February 2009.

About 50% of Americans regularly take dietary supplements in the hopes of preventing chronic diseases like cancer and heart disease, spending more than \$20 billion every year. Despite their widespread appeal, scientific research has been unable to show that dietary supplements can improve health, with a few exceptions (such as the benefits of folic acid in women considering pregnancy). Previous studies of multivitamins have had mixed results, with some showing protection against heart disease and some cancers, but most finding no effect at all.

This study followed 161,808 postmenopausal women between the ages of 50 and 79, 42% of whom were taking multivitamins. After 8 years, the group taking multivitamins had the same chances of suffering a heart attack, stroke, or blood clot in the veins of the leg as women who did not take multivitamins. Vitamins did not reduce the overall cancer rate, the rates of specific cancers (including invasive breast cancer), or the risk of dying in the next 8 years.

The Woman's Health Initiative is one of the largest studies of postmenopausal women's health, and this new report provides the strongest evidence so far that multivitamins do not help prevent chronic disease, even when taken for long periods. The study did have some limitations: it was an observational study, so even though researchers tried to account for other

health behaviors of the participants, it is possible that the results were influenced by other factors. See our [Understanding Research](#) article for more on the different types of research studies and what they can reveal. This study only looked at middle-aged and older women, so it is not known if the results also apply to other groups—younger women who start taking multivitamins early in life, for example.

When it comes to preventing heart disease, unfortunately a simple daily pill is probably not the answer. Instead, devote your energy (and your hard-earned cash) towards proven strategies such as a balanced, [heart healthy diet](#) and daily [exercise](#). Also, be sure to discuss any heart disease [risk factors](#) you have with your doctor so you can get them under control.

For Further Reading:

[Should I take vitamin or mineral supplements to prevent heart disease?](#)

[Dr. Lansky Answers: Are there any superfoods to prevent heart disease? Any supplements I should be taking?](#)

Source: Neuhaus ML, Wassertheil-Smoller S, et al. Multivitamin Use and Risk of Cancer and Cardiovascular Disease in the Women's Health Initiative Cohorts. Archives of Internal Medicine. 2009;169:294-304

[SEO](#) by [AceSEF](#)