

U.S. Preventive Services Task Force Issues Draft Recommendation Statement on Multivitamins for the Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease and Cancer

WASHINGTON, D.C. – November 12, 2013 – The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) today posted its draft recommendation statement and final evidence report on vitamin, mineral, and multivitamin supplements for the prevention of cardiovascular disease and cancer. The Task Force is providing an opportunity for public comment on this draft recommendation statement until December 9. All public comments will be considered as the Task Force develops its final recommendation statement.

Vitamin and mineral supplements are commonly used in the United States, with half of adults taking at least one dietary supplement. People take vitamin and mineral supplements for many reasons, such as improving their overall health and preventing illness. For this recommendation, the Task Force focused specifically on whether these nutrients could help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease or cancer.

“In general, the Task Force found that there is not enough evidence to determine whether you can reduce your risk of cardiovascular disease or cancer by taking single or paired nutrients, or a multivitamin,” says Task Force co-chair Michael LeFevre, M.D., M.S.P.H. “However, there were two major exceptions: beta-carotene and vitamin E, both of which clearly do not help prevent these diseases.”

Based on the lack of evidence, the Task Force determined that it cannot recommend for or against taking vitamins and minerals alone, as pairs, or in a multivitamin in order to help prevent cardiovascular disease or cancer, so it issued I statements. However, the Task Force did find that there was sufficient evidence to recommend against using either beta-carotene or vitamin E for the prevention of cardiovascular disease or cancer, and it issued a D recommendation for both nutrients. The evidence shows that there is no benefit to taking vitamin E and that beta-carotene can be harmful because it increases the risk of lung cancer in people who are already at increased risk for lung cancer.

“Many people take dietary supplements to support their general health and wellness,” says Task Force member Wanda Nicholson, M.D., M.P.H., M.B.A. “In the absence of clear evidence about the impact of most vitamins and multivitamins on cardiovascular disease and cancer, health care professionals should counsel their patients to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet that is rich in nutrients. They should also continue to consider the latest scientific research, their own experiences, and their patient’s health history and preferences when having conversations about nutritional supplements.”

The Task Force’s draft recommendation statement has been posted for public comment on the Task Force Web site at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org. Comments can be submitted from November 12 to December 9, 2013 at www.uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org/tfcomment.htm.

The Task Force is an independent, volunteer panel of national experts in prevention and evidence-based medicine that works to improve the health of all Americans by making evidence-based recommendations about clinical preventive services such as screenings, counseling services, and preventive medications.

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