

No Deaths from Vitamins - None at All in 27 Years

Commentary by Andrew W. Saul and Jagan N. Vaman, M.D.

(OMNS, June 14, 2011) Over a twenty-seven year period, vitamin supplements have been alleged to have caused the deaths of a total of eleven people in the United States. A new analysis of US poison control center annual report data indicates that there have, in fact, been no deaths whatsoever from vitamins . . . none at all, in the 27 years that such reports have been available.

The American Association of Poison Control Centers (AAPCC) attributes annual deaths to vitamins as:

2009: zero	2000: zero	1991: two
2008: zero	1999: zero	1990: one
2007: zero	1998: zero	1989: zero
2006: one	1997: zero	1988: zero
2005: zero	1996: zero	1987: one
2004: two	1995: zero	1986: zero
2003: two	1994: zero	1985: zero
2002: one	1993: one	1984: zero
2001: zero	1992: zero	1983: zero

Even if these figures are taken as correct, and even if they include intentional and accidental misuse, the number of alleged vitamin fatalities is strikingly low, averaging less than one death per year for over two and a half decades. In 19 of those 27 years, AAPCC reports that there was not one single death due to vitamins. [1]

Still, the Orthomolecular Medicine News Service Editorial Board was curious: Did eleven people really die from vitamins? And if so, how?

Vitamins Not THE Cause of Death

In determining cause of death, AAPCC uses a four-point scale called Relative Contribution to Fatality (RCF). A rating of 1 means "Undoubtedly Responsible"; 2 means "Probably Responsible"; 3 means "Contributory"; and 4 means "Probably Not Responsible." In examining poison control data for the year 2006, listing one vitamin death, it was seen that the vitamin's Relative Contribution to Fatality (RCF) was a 4. Since a score of "4" means "Probably Not Responsible," it quite negates the claim that a person died from a vitamin in 2006.

Vitamins Not A Cause of Death

In the other seven years reporting one or more of the remaining ten alleged vitamin fatalities, studying the AAPCC reports reveals an absence of any RCF rating for vitamins in any of those years. If there is no Relative Contribution to Fatality at all, then the substance did not contribute to death at all.

Furthermore, in each of those remaining seven years, there is no substantiation provided to demonstrate that any vitamin was a cause of death.

If there is insufficient information about the cause of death to make a clear-cut declaration of cause, then subsequent assertions that vitamins cause deaths are not evidence-based. Although vitamin supplements have often been blamed for causing fatalities, there is no evidence to back up this allegation.

References:

1. Download any Annual Report of the American Association of Poison Control Centers from 1983-2009 free of charge at <http://www.aapcc.org/dnn/NPDSpoisonData/NPDSAnnualReports.aspx> The "Vitamin" category is usually near the very end of the report.

Most recent year: Bronstein AC, Spyker DA, Cantilena LR Jr, Green JL, Rumack BH, Giffin SL. 2009 Annual Report of the American Association of Poison Control Centers' National Poison Data System (NPDS): 27th Annual Report. *Clinical Toxicology* (2010). 48, 979-1178. The full text article is available for free download at <http://www.aapcc.org/dnn/Portals/0/2009%20AR.pdf>

The vitamin data mentioned above will be found in Table 22B.

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