

Vitamin C RDA Increase Could Help Reduce Heart Disease, Stroke, Cancer

The recommended dietary allowance (RDA) of vitamin C is less than half what it should be, scientists argue in a recent report published in *Critical Reviews in Food Science and Nutrition*. Researchers said that there is compelling evidence that the RDA of vitamin C should be raised to 200 mg/day for adults, up from its current levels in the United States of 75 mg for women and 90 mg for men.

Rather than just prevent the vitamin C deficiency disease of scurvy, said researchers, it's appropriate to seek optimum levels that will saturate cells and tissues, pose no risk and may have significant effects on public health at almost no expense—about a penny a day if taken as a dietary supplement.

“It's time to bring some common sense to this issue, look at the totality of the scientific evidence and go beyond some clinical trials that are inherently flawed,” said Balz Frei, professor and director of the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University and one of the world's leading experts on the role of vitamin C in optimum health. “Significant numbers of people in the U.S. and around the world are deficient in vitamin C, and there's growing evidence that more of this vitamin could help prevent chronic disease. The way clinical researchers study micronutrients right now, with the same type of so-called ‘phase three randomized placebo-controlled trials’ used to test pharmaceutical drugs, almost ensures they will find no beneficial effect. We need to get past that.”

Unlike testing the safety or function of a prescription drug, researchers said, such trials are ill suited to demonstrate the disease prevention capabilities of substances that are already present in the human body and required for normal metabolism. Some benefits of micronutrients in lowering chronic disease risk also show up only after many years or even decades of optimal consumption of vitamin C—a factor often not captured in shorter-term clinical studies.

A wider body of metabolic, pharmacokinetic, laboratory and demographic studies suggests just the opposite, that higher levels of vitamin C could help reduce the chronic diseases that today kill most people in the developed world—heart disease, stroke, cancer and the underlying issues that lead to them, such as high blood pressure, chronic inflammation, poor immune response and atherosclerosis.

“We believe solid research shows the RDA should be increased,” Frei said. “And the benefit-to-risk ratio is very high. A 200 mg intake of vitamin C on a daily basis poses absolutely no risk, but there is strong evidence it would provide multiple, substantial health benefits.”

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