

Vitamin D, the new panacea

Linnus Pauling won two Nobel Prizes, but at the end of a remarkable life—a life highlighted by worldwide recognition of his significant scientific advancements and the kind of insight that usually results in a Mensa invitation—he blew it. I'm not sure if he was just off the mark a bit with the biochemical underpinnings of his vitamin C theory or was merely demonstrating the mild dementia of aging the rest of us mere mortals can look forward to. In case you don't remember, Dr Pauling suggested that extremely high doses of vitamin C would prevent a host of diseases, including various cancers, heart disease, collagen vascular disease, and, most importantly, the common cold. Dr Pauling apparently was the driving force at the time for a small group of bioscientists who were starting to look at something new called antioxidants and antioxidant effects. For some not very clear reason vitamin C was chosen as the new naturally occurring wonder substance, and all that was needed was time, a large compliant population, and the scientific proof would certainly come. Dr Pauling suggested at one point that the population of Haida Gwaii would be the perfect population to be tested, as they were quite isolated and relatively easy to study. Unfortunately, Dr Pauling died before he could put the proposal to the population of Haida Gwaii, but I have a sneaking suspicion that the unique individuals who choose to live there (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) would not be terribly compliant with the good doctor's study design. As we all know, vitamin C does none of the things that Dr Pauling was convinced it would do irrespective of the fact that millions of people continue to take high doses of the stuff (in addition to echinacea and Cold FX) the moment

they get a sniffle. I wonder if Linnus is smiling?

Vitamin E was the next of nature's wonder drugs and had been touted for years as a powerful antioxidant with significant cardio-protective and anti-cancer effects. Countless millions of

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people have taken relatively high doses of this substance over the past 20 years or more expecting that by so doing they were not only prolonging their life, but also keeping their coronary arteries as clean as if they had been actually eating properly over all those years. All the recent studies show that vitamin E does none of the wonderful things the makers and sellers of these vitamins have claimed (and continue to claim) for these many years. The homocysteine and vitamin B₁₂/folate supplementation story is now a well-known addition to the other scientifically debunked theories of vitamin use polycures, and I have been waiting with bated breath for the next great vitamin-related antioxidant craze so I can invest some money in the company with the most inventive marketing team.

Well, it seems that vitamin D is it. A large, apparently well-designed study involving 1200 women over four years has recently hit the press. The investigators concluded that female subjects taking 2000 IUs daily experienced a significant reduction (60%) in all malignancies. As there were no men in the study it is understandable why men weren't mentioned, but what is it about that X chromosome anyway? It

seems that there are very few, if any, down sides to taking high doses of vitamin D, with some extremely interesting potential long-term benefits in a wide variety of disease processes. (Does the word *panacea* come to mind?) To a rapidly aging member of the Me Generation, I find the thought of longevity without chemotherapy appealing.

Unfortunately, when I visited my local pharmacy I was bitterly disappointed to find that a bottle containing 240 pills (500 IUs) only costs around \$5. I guess I will have to look elsewhere for an investment opportunity in the same industry that saw me neglect to see the potential in a little drug called Viagra.

—JAW

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