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Healthy Perspectives: Secret to longer life is love

Dr. Terence Moran

The verdict is in: Antioxidant vitamins don't help you live longer. In fact, taking them may even be detrimental to your health!

That's right, folks — beta carotene, vitamin A and vitamin E, taken singly or in combination, may increase mortality, according to a synthesis of studies on the subject, published in the Feb. 28 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

The study, involving over 230,000 patients, also showed that vitamin C and selenium had no significant effect on mortality. So there you have it, taking these types of vitamins may be killing you, not helping you.

Admittedly, the theory was promising enough: Disturbances in our cell's normal state via oxidative stress could lead to the escaping of oxygen free radicals and peroxides. These are bad actors that go around damaging the cell's lipids and proteins and even DNA. So antioxidants, such as the aforementioned vitamins, could come in as heroes and take these bad players out of commission, thus preventing cancer and heart disease, and possibly slowing the aging process.

No such luck, unfortunately. The take-home message for me was one I've heard before: Don't confuse a theory with a fact.

But fear not, gentle reader. It happens that there is something that will add years to your life, although you may be surprised by the answer. There has been a substantial and mounting body of scientific evidence arguing that love lengthens your life. Most of the data has been compiled in a book by Dr. Dean Ornish called "Love and Survival," published by Harper Collins in 1998. Consider a few of the many studies:

In Cleveland, men who answered "yes" to the question, "Does your wife show you her love?" had significantly less angina (heart-related chest pain) than other men with the same risk factors. Men who answered "no" had twice as much angina.

A study of Harvard University students showed that serious medical problems were present after 35 years in 91 percent of participants who rated their relationship with their mother as not being warm. If the relationship was warm, the illness rate was cut in half.

In Alameda County California, a study of 7,000 people revealed that those who lacked social and community ties (contact with friends, marriage, church or other groups) were two to three times more likely to die in the follow-up period.

A Stanford University study showed that women with metastatic breast cancer who attended support groups lived twice as long as those not attending.

In Pittsburgh, 276 adult volunteers were given the common cold virus to inhale. The higher the number of social relationships a person had, the less likely that person was to develop cold symptoms.

This evidence is so strong that Dr. Ornish concludes, "I am not aware of any other factor in medicine that has a greater impact on our survival than the healing power of love and intimacy. Not diet, not smoking, not exercise, not stress, not genetics, not drugs, not surgery."

Doctors take notice! Our patients need to hear this beautiful information.

Parents, be warm and loving with your children, and with each other.

Adults, surround yourselves with many people who care about you. Find and commit to someone who eagerly shows his or her love to you over your long, and growing longer, lives together.

This medical advice isn't always easy to follow | grudges have to be forgiven, risks have to be taken and efforts have to be made.

It's much easier to swallow an antioxidant vitamin; but the secret to a healthier, happier and longer life is love.

Pass it on.