
NUTRITION MATTERS

MULTI-MICRONUTRIENT SUPPLEMENTS DELAY HIV PROGRESSION

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Dear colleagues;

Previous intervention studies showed that in HIV+ pregnant women, supplementation with multimicronutrients was associated with improved pregnancy outcomes: reduced rates of low birth weight, prematurity, and fetal death. Observational studies have suggested that micronutrient status could be a determinant of the progression of HIV disease. In the present study in Tanzania, 1078 HIV+ pregnant women were enrolled in a double-blind, placebo-controlled trial to examine the effects of daily supplements (during pregnancy and after birth) of vitamin A, multivitamins (vitamins B, C, and E), or both on progression of HIV disease. All of the women received the standard iron+folic acid supplement during pregnancy, whether they were in the vitamin or the placebo group.

Of the 271 women who received multivitamins, 18 (7 %) progressed to stage-4 HIV disease during the course of the study, compared to 31 (12%) of the 267 women who received a placebo (relative risk, 0.50; P=0.02): a 50 percent reduction in the risk of progression to AIDS. Multivitamins also resulted in significantly higher CD4+ and CD8+ cell counts and significantly lower viral loads. The authors conclude that multivitamin supplements: a) can delay the progression of HIV disease; b) can provide an effective, low-cost means of delaying the initiation of antiretroviral therapy in HIV+ women; and c) should be encouraged as supportive care to those infected with HIV.

These findings should also stimulate broader discussion about the role of nutrition in the public health response to HIV/AIDS in Africa. It becomes increasingly clear that, as access to antiretroviral therapy expands, the nutrition care and support needs of people living with HIV/AIDS must be addressed. Otherwise, there would be irony - as editorialists rightly point out - in ensuring access to antiretroviral drugs to populations that lack access to safe water and food.

ENJOY! (... and share with your colleagues and counterparts).

Attached: a) Fawzi et al. A randomized trial of multivitamin supplements and HIV disease progression and mortality. *New England Journal of Medicine*. July, 2004. b) Marston and De Cock. Multivitamins, nutrition, and antiretroviral therapy for HIV disease in Africa.

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