

Table 2. Serum biomarker levels of long-term users of multiple dietary supplements (Multi Supp), multivitamin users (Single Supp) and nonusers (No Supp).

BIOMARKERS	No Supp	Single Supp	Multi Supp
Homocysteine (µmol/L)	9.9	9.5	6.3
hs C-reactive protein (mg/L)	5.1	3.6	2.2
Total cholesterol (mg/dL)	209.7	209.4	202.2
LDL cholesterol (mg/dL)	124.5	127.8	121.6
HDL cholesterol (mg/dL)	51.9	53.6	58.3
Ratio: total cholesterol to HDL-C	4.4	4.2	3.9
Triglycerides (mg/dL)	173.8	152.2	116.5

*Differences in biomarker concentrations among user groups (all data from NHANES 2001–2002) were adjusted for sex, age and age², education category, income category and income², and body mass index (BMI) where possible.

Conclusions

This landmark study provides compelling support for the health benefits seen in long-term users of a broad array of dietary supplements as compared to single multivitamin and non-supplement users. Long-term multiple dietary supplement users were found to consume a broad array of vitamin/mineral, botanical, and condition-specific dietary supplements on a daily basis. They were more likely to have optimal concentrations of chronic disease-related biomarkers including serum homocysteine, high-sensitivity C-reactive protein, high-density lipoprotein cholesterol, and triglycerides and less likely to have suboptimal blood nutrient concentrations including folate, vitamin C, alpha and beta carotene, and vitamin E. Long-term supplement users also had a lower risk of prevalent elevated blood pressure and diabetes compared to nonusers and single multivitamin users.

This study is believed to be the first to describe the usage patterns of long-term users of multiple dietary supplements, an unusual sample that is difficult to capture in national surveys. Thus, this snapshot of the nutrient and health correlates of this practice may serve as a springboard for other researchers to study this growing segment of the population who seek long-

term health benefits through long-term use of multiple dietary supplements.

Study Limitations

A limitation of the study is the fact that the data are cross-sectional, and therefore the reported associations, particularly with health outcomes (i.e., blood pressure and diabetes), cannot presume causality. In addition, although the investigators adjusted for potential confounders such as age, sex, income, education, and BMI, residual confounding could possibly account for the study findings. Finally, although quite compelling in their support for the health benefits of supplementation, the study findings need to be confirmed by further research into the dietary supplement usage patterns, health, and nutritional status of other groups of long-term users of broad arrays of dietary supplements.

References

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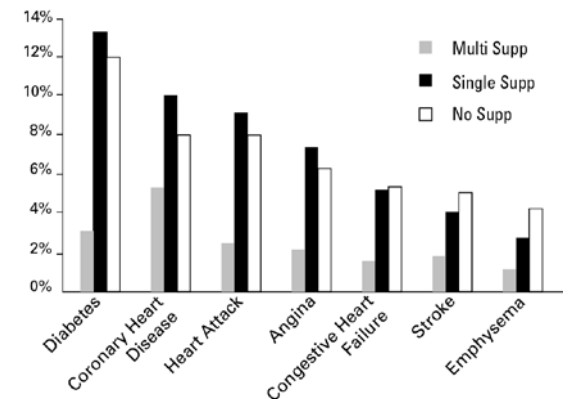
Usage Patterns, Health, and Nutritional Status of Long-Term Multiple Dietary Supplement Users

Introduction

Dietary supplement use in the United States is widespread and represents an important source of nutrition. But little is known about individuals who routinely consume multiple dietary supplements. This study was undertaken to describe the dietary supplement usage patterns, health, and nutritional status of long-term multiple dietary supplement users and makes comparisons to nonusers and other multivitamin supplement users.

And the results are historic and impressive. Long-term dietary supplement use was consistently associated with more favorable blood levels of measured nutrients and key heart health biomarkers. More important, long-term users of multiple dietary supplements reported lower prevalence of disease in seven of eight self-reported health conditions, including a 72% and 62% lower risk of diabetes compared to other multivitamin users and nonusers, and a 39% lower risk of elevated blood pressure than nonusers.

Graph 1. Risk of Prevalent Disease (%) in long-term users of multiple dietary supplements (Multi Supp), multivitamin users (Single Supp) and nonusers (No Supp)



Background

Diet and nutrition have long been thought to play key roles in achieving and maintaining optimal health and prevention of disease [1,2]. Vitamin/mineral supplements often provide 100% or more of the Daily Value of one or more essential nutrients and are widely used. Therefore, vitamin and mineral supplements are a key source of essential nutrients and may be key factors in health outcomes [3,4]. Dietary supplements, including varied antioxidant and phytonutrient ingredients, are also taken by an increasing number of health conscious consumers in support of their commitment to achieve optimal health.

In the most recent reporting of data from the largest and longest-running national health and nutrition survey known as the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) 1999–2000, sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, dietary supplement usage increased with age, education, affluence, in women, and in Caucasians [4]. Fifty-two percent of adults reported use of dietary supplements and 47% reported taking just one type of supplement, usually a multivitamin/mineral [4]. Although users of multiple dietary supplements appear to be a growing population, they appear to be under studied as little, if any, descriptive information has been reported about them [4]. In fact, only 3 of 11,000 NHANES participants reported the use of 20 or more different dietary supplements in the past 30 days.

The Study

The study objectives were to describe the dietary supplement usage patterns, health, and nutritional status of long-term multiple dietary supplement users, and to make appropriate comparisons to matched single multivitamin supplement users and nonusers. Gladys Block, Ph.D., renowned researcher and Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health Nutrition at the University of California, Berkeley School of Public Health, led the research team in its efforts to conduct the first-of-its-kind study on a unique population of long-term users of a broad array of a single brand of dietary supplements.

Methods

Using a cross-sectional study design, information was obtained from online questionnaires and on-site physical examinations from a sample of long-term users of multiple dietary supplements manufactured by Shaklee Corporation, Pleasanton, CA (Multi

Supp users, n=279). Within this group, 87% of users reported having taken 20 or more different supplements daily and usage began at least 20 years ago. Data for matched nonusers (No Supp users, n=602) and single multivitamin supplement users (Single Supp users, n=176) were obtained from NHANES 2001–2002 and NHANES III 1988–1994.

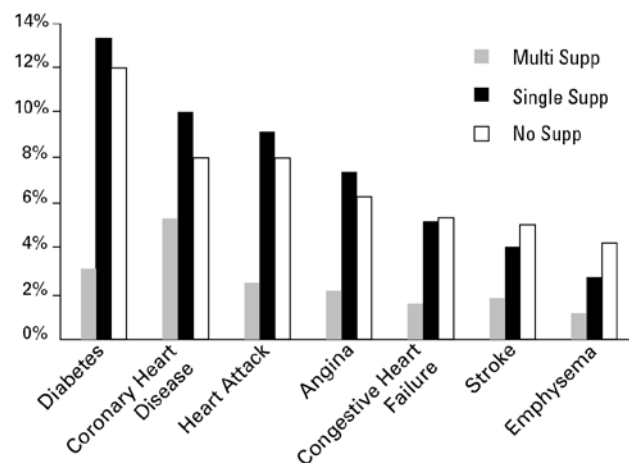
Results

Dietary supplements consumed on a daily basis by more than 50% of Multi Supp users included such products as a multivitamin/mineral, vitamin B-complex, vitamin C, carotenoids, calcium with vitamin D, omega-3 fatty acids, flavonoids, glucosamine, an herbal immune supplement, a probiotic supplement (women), and a soy protein supplement (men).

Risk of Prevalent Disease

When investigators examined disease prevalence, two findings stood out. First, the risk of elevated blood pressure was 39% lower in Multi Supp users than in nonusers. Second, the risk of diabetes was 72% lower in Multi Supp users compared to nonusers, and 62% lower compared to Single Supp users only. Multi Supp users also had the lowest prevalence of self-reported disease in five of six additional disease categories (Graph 1) assessed, although these differences did not achieve statistical significance. Finally, Multi Supp users were 4 times and 3.4 times more likely to describe their health as "very good" or "excellent" compared to nonusers and Single Supp users, respectively.

Graph 1. Risk of Prevalent Disease (%) in long-term users of multiple dietary supplements (Multi Supp), multivitamin users (Single Supp) and nonusers (No Supp)



Blood Nutrients

Blood nutrient levels generally increased with increasing dietary supplement use. Nutrients including folate, vitamin C, alpha and beta carotene, and vitamin E were consistently found at healthier blood levels in the Multi Supp population (Table 1). To address the safety of long-term use of a broad array of supplements, the investigators also found healthy and safe blood levels of vitamin D and iron, nutrients for which high intakes have been associated with possible adverse effects. For example, among women, serum ferritin, a measure of iron storage, was highest in the Multi Supp group but lowest in male Multi Supp users compared to the two other groups.

Table 1. Serum nutrient levels of long-term users of multiple dietary supplements (Multi Supp), multivitamin users (Single Supp), and nonusers (No Supp).

NUTRIENTS	No Supp	Single Supp	Multi Supp
RBC folate (nmol/L)	657.7	909.5	1165.8
Retinol (µg/dL)	60.5	65.4	66.4
Ascorbic acid (mg/dL)	0.67	0.96	1.64
Alpha tocopherol (mg/dL)	1.1	1.4	2.9
Alpha carotene (µg/dL)	4.6	5.6	27.6
Beta carotene (µg/dL)	19.7	28.1	64.0
Ferritin (µg/L) Male	200.2	202.0	117.7
Ferritin (µg/L) Female	109.5	81.9	124.5

* Differences in nutrient concentrations among user groups (all data from NHANES 2001–2002) were adjusted for sex, age and age², education category, income category and income², and body mass index (BMI) where possible.

Blood Biomarkers

Multi Supp users had higher blood levels of HDL cholesterol and lower blood levels of triglycerides, both consistent with lower heart disease risk. Increased supplement use was also associated with more favorable concentrations of serum homocysteine and high-sensitivity C-reactive protein (CRP), a marker of low-grade inflammation (Table 2). Of note, none of the 279 Multi Supp study participants had an elevated CRP level (>3.0 mg/L), identified as "high risk" by the American Heart Association.