

# ***Vitamin E – Fact & Fiction***

By Ryan N. Harrison, MA

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Lately, the media has been having a field day with vitamin E, spinning one story after another in an attempt to discredit it as a safe and effective nutritional supplement. Most recently, Neil Levin, Nutrition Educator and Clinical Nutritionist, in his article “The Truth About Vitamin E – Vitamin E is Safer Than Implied,” (available at [www.nowfoods.com](http://www.nowfoods.com)) presented a clear-cut picture of how and why this faulty information is being generated and disseminated.

Apparently, researchers have been performing “meta-analyses” on vitamin E (that is, examining and comparing previously published studies in order to try and mine more information out of them), and have been drawing all sorts of conclusions that are highly speculative. The problem with running a meta-analysis is that the protocol for each study included is often different enough that it becomes a stretch to link results from multiple studies and to imply a common thread runs through them. Yet, this is exactly what has been done with studies relating to vitamin E. The result: flawed conclusions that generate “much heat but no light on the truth of vitamin E safety.” In the meta-analysis mentioned above, several aspects stand out as peculiar. For example:

- The team of researchers used only studies where at least ten people died (from any cause – not necessarily from vitamin E supplementation) during the course of the studies.
- Many of the patients involved in the studies analyzed were elderly and sick, and therefore not a benchmark for vitamin E supplementation for healthy and younger people.
- The studies analyzed used different doses and types of vitamin E (i.e., synthetic versus natural forms).
- Ten of the nineteen studies reviewed did not even isolate vitamin E; participants were using other dietary supplements simultaneously.

One has to question why this type of analysis is even performed, considering that the results are often too broad to be of much value. In this particular case, the only message that the public hears is that vitamin E – and by relationship, any vitamin – can be dangerous. Is this kind of message a coincidence, considering the well-proven fact that vitamins help prevent disease, are less expensive than most medicines, and that our freedom to choose and self-administer vitamins is presently threatened? You decide...

## **Natural vs. Synthetic**

Natural vitamin E is called “d-alpha tocopherol” and synthetic vitamin E is called “dl-alpha tocopherol.” There are actually eight forms of vitamin E (e.g., beta tocopherol, gamma tocopherol, delta tocopherol), but alpha tocopherol is the most active form in humans. The synthetic form of vitamin E is cheap to produce and also the least effective form. Many nutritionists recommend – and rightly so – a natural vitamin E supplement with “mixed tocopherols.” This assures that you are getting the most effective forms of vitamin E, which work synergistically with each other and with other nutrients in the body to help maintain good health.

In the meantime, I am happy to present to you information that I know is verifiable and correct. Here are statements about vitamin E that have been made by respected and knowledgeable sources:

*Vitamin E is an “antioxidant, protecting cells from damage, including against cancer. [It] helps the body use oxygen, preventing blood clots, thrombosis, and atherosclerosis. [It] improves wound healing and fertility...[and is] good for the skin.”*

~ Patrick Holford, The Optimum Nutrition Bible

*“Vitamin E (alpha tocopherol): Primary antioxidant that protects red blood cells and is essential in cellular respiration; important for healthy hair and skin, reducing scarring, and preventing cancer, blood clots, and heart disease; useful for reducing blood pressure, improving athletic performance, preventing muscle cramps, and in treating anemia, autoimmune diseases, cataracts, diabetes, fibrocystic breast conditions, herpes virus (shingles), impotence, PMS, menstrual pain, osteoarthritis, ulcers, and viruses.”*

~ Alternative Medicine: The Definitive Guide

*“Vitamin E, in addition to being a powerful antioxidant, is a natural anticoagulant that offers some protection against heart attacks and thrombotic strokes. I also find it useful as a treatment for a number of female disorders, including fibrocystic breast disease, PMS, and painful or excessive menstruation. It is not toxic, even in megadoses. Applied topically, it reduces scar formation following surgery, burns, or other skin injuries.”*

~ Dr. Andrew Weil, Natural Health, Natural Medicine