



Written by [Dennis Behreandt](#) on August 19, 2020

Study: Multivitamin Supplementation Works, Reduces Illness Symptoms

Millions of Americans take vitamins and other supplements, hoping that they will lead to improved health and wellness. Many of those taking such supplements believe they will work but can't often point to actual evidence of efficacy.

Moreover, the mainstream press has not been averse to casting doubt on dietary supplements. The widely read and generally popular *Consumer Reports*, for example, [had this to say about multivitamins](#) in 2014:

"Multis can help prevent nutrient deficiencies in specific groups, such as pregnant women. But clinical trials repeatedly have failed to prove that the pills benefit healthy people." They also warn: "It's possible to overdose on certain nutrients such as vitamin A and calcium, which many multis contain. So keep track of how much you get in total from your diet, including fortified foods such as cereal."

A new study, however, found that multivitamin and mineral supplementation does, in fact, lead to improved health outcomes.

Titled, "The Effect of a Multivitamin and Mineral Supplement on Immune Function in Healthy Older Adults: A Double-Blind, Randomized, Controlled Trial," the [study](#) was published in the journal *Nutrients* in July. Authored by researchers with the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University, the study looked at whether "taking a multi-vitamin and mineral supplement (MVM) could improve immune function in individuals 55 and older."

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As rationale for the study, the authors noted that "vitamin deficiencies play a primary etiological role in global disease burden." As many as 35 percent of older adults in the United States, Canada, and Europe, they pointed out, have deficiencies in at least one, and sometimes several, micronutrients.

"This is especially the case for vitamin C, zinc, and vitamin D," the researchers noted. "These deficiencies may contribute to age-related decline of the immune system, which is most often characterized by increased levels of inflammation, reduced innate immune function and reduced T-cell function." For the study, men and women aged 55-75 were separated into two groups. One group was given the multivitamin supplement daily for 12 weeks. The other placebo group was given inert tablets daily for two weeks.

The multivitamin provided to participants contained vitamins A, D, E, B6, Folate, B12, and C, along with





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trace elements iron, copper, zinc, and selenium.

In response to supplementation, the researchers found that “plasma vitamin C increased 126 percent” in those receiving the multivitamin compared to those receiving the placebo. The researchers also found that “serum zinc increased 43 percent” compared to the placebo group. For vitamin D, though, the researchers reported that “no significant changes were observed.”

The researchers found that use of a multivitamin supplement had the effect of improving illness outcomes. “We present data showing an MVM supplement that is high in several redox-active and immunomodulatory micronutrients, and increases blood levels of both vitamin C and zinc in study participants,” the researchers wrote in a discussion of their findings. “In turn, these changes in nutrient levels were associated with a significant decline in reported illness in the MVM treatment group.”

Elaborating further on this finding, they continued:

We did observe a statistically significant decrease in severity and length of reported illnesses in treatment versus placebo. In prior studies with patients that were suffering from the common cold, improvements with a short-term treatment combining zinc with high-dose vitamin C were noted. Authors of both randomized controlled trials and systematic reviews of these trials concluded that zinc could reduce cold duration. In this study, we treated participants for 3 months and monitored self-reported illness during this period. We observed significant increases in both zinc and vitamin C in the MVM arm and it was associated with a significant decrease in duration and severity of illness (about 3-fold for duration and about 3-6 fold for severity) compared with the placebo arm. Although this was not one of our primary outcomes, we note it as an intriguing observation that is indicative of clinical relevance.

Though the study failed to confirm that important immune-specific responses were improved by the tested supplementation regimen, the authors reported that their “findings support further research to test our hypothesis that MVM supplementation can improve immune outcomes in older adults.”

This point was emphasized by study co-author Adrian Gombert, a principle investigator and professor in the department of biochemistry and biophysics at the Linus Pauling Institute.

“Supplementation was associated with significantly increased circulating levels of zinc and vitamin C, and with illness symptoms that were less severe and shorter lasting,” Gombart said, according to an [Oregon State University press release](#). “This supports findings that stretch back decades, even to the days of Linus Pauling’s work with vitamin C. Our results suggest more and better designed research studies are needed to explore the positive role multivitamin and mineral supplementation might play in bolstering the immune system of older adults.”

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