



Sorry, Vitamin C Isn't the Miracle Cure Your Mom Told You It Was



You've probably heard that to avoid getting sick, you need to make sure you're taking in plenty of vitamin C. Maybe you've also heard it helps you feel better sooner if you've already developed a nasty cold. Is there any truth to vitamin C being a big cure-all for what ails you? Probably not, but there is a little bit of good news. Let's take a look.

Vitamin C & the common cold

The common cold is caused by any number of respiratory viruses. A virus cannot be treated with antibiotics. Usually, the person who is suffering from a cold just has to manage symptoms while they wait for their illness to end. It's no wonder, then, that people are *very* interested in finding something that will either prevent colds in the first place — or will shorten their duration.

Unfortunately, vitamin C doesn't seem to prevent most people from catching a cold. A large-scale study by the University of Helsinki in Finland looked over 29 medical trials that involved 11,306 people who used at least 200 milligrams per

day of vitamin C supplementation. They didn't find any evidence that taking vitamin C daily reduced most people's risk of catching a cold. There were a few outliers, though, as marathon runners and skiers *did* show a risk reduction of around 50 percent, which is great news if you're a serious athlete.

This study also looked at whether vitamin C supplementation had any effect on the duration of a cold, and there may be a bit of good news. Supplementation shortened the duration by 8 percent in adults and by 14 percent in kids. However, when this was put to therapeutic trial, researchers were unfortunately not able to replicate these results.

Other potential benefits

Even though vitamin C supplementation probably won't prevent a cold, the possibility that it *can* help is encouraging, and taking recommended amounts of vitamin C certainly won't hurt you. Dr. Monisha Bhanote, a triple board-certified physician, explains that vitamin C has antioxidant properties and is an important part of the *synthesis collagen*, which helps make up our skin, tendons, bones and ligaments.

The benefits don't stop there, though. "Other less[er]-known benefits include decreased systolic blood pressure in patients with hypertension and decreased requirement for inhaled steroids for asthma patients," Bhanote tells SheKnows.

However, is this going to cure your influenza or keep germs at bay in the middle of virus season? No.

You probably don't even need vitamins — at all

Dr. Niket Sonpal, assistant professor at Touro College of Osteopathic Medicine, tells SheKnows that vitamins aren't really necessary for most of us. The key, though, is a good diet that's chock-full of fruits and vegetables. "Additionally, eating your nutrients [through food] promotes health not only by providing known vitamins, but also because it contains fiber and other less well-defined nutrients and replaces meat and animal fat."

He does note that those on restricted or special diets or those living in regions of the world with widespread malnutrition, may need vitamins, but most of us don't.

To make sure you're getting enough vitamin C from the foods you eat, make sure you have plenty of citrus fruits on hand, including oranges and grapefruit. However, there are loads more foods that have vitamin C on board.

“Let’s not forget jalapeños, tomatoes and tomato juice,” Sonpal says. “I tend to remind patients that... kale and parsley are also packed with vitamin C.” Don’t stop there, though. Other great sources include red pepper, kiwifruit, broccoli and green pepper.

Don’t overdo it

If you do use vitamin C supplements, here’s just a word of caution — there are a few side effects to look out for, according to Dr. Arlene Dijamco, an integrative physician. “For most, there are very little risks supplementing vitamin C, as your body will get rid of any excess in the urine,” she tells SheKnows. “Some people may experience gastrointestinal upset, such as diarrhea, nausea and/or abdominal pain.” Also, high doses of vitamin C supplementation can increase the risk of kidney stones, which you definitely do not want.

So, bottom line — vitamin C won’t prevent you from getting a cold, but it may shorten the duration of your illness by 8 percent, which isn’t a whole lot. However, there is something to be said for eating a varied diet and getting all your vitamins the natural way, and if you want to pop some vitamin C, it probably won’t hurt as long as you don’t go wild.

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