



**THE HEALTH SUPPLEMENTS INFORMATION SERVICE COMMENTS ON A
TRIAL EVALUATING B VITAMINS IN PATIENTS WITH ALZHEIMER'S
DISEASE**

October 14, 2008

In response to a paper published in this week's issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)¹ which concluded that B vitamins did not slow cognitive decline in patients with Alzheimer's disease, the Health Supplements Information Service (HSIS) would like to make the following comment:

Pamela Mason, spokesperson for HSIS notes:” This is yet another study attempting to use high dose vitamin supplements like drugs in the treatment and prevention of disease. B vitamin supplements are not intended to be taken like drugs to prevent or treat Alzheimer's disease. People should not be taking them for this purpose. They are **health supplements** and their role is in helping to maintain good health, particularly in those large numbers of adults whose dietary intake is low. This study, like many other recent studies evaluating vitamins, does not address the issue of health maintenance.

The researchers compared a combination of high-dose folic acid (5mg/day), vitamin B6 (25mg/day) and vitamin B12 (1mg/day) or placebo. Patients were assigned to two unequally sized groups (202 to the vitamin B group and 138 to the placebo group) to improve enrollment. B vitamins can lower plasma homocysteine levels and high homocysteine levels have been associated with Alzheimer's disease.

The main outcome measure in this study was cognitive ability measured using the rate of change in the Alzheimer Disease Assessment Scale ADAS-cog). The researchers found that the vitamin B supplement reduced homocysteine, but had no effect on the

¹ *JAMA*. 2008; 300(15)1774-83

primary outcome measure; the rate of change in the ADAS-cog did not differ significantly between groups. It is important to realize that the subjects in this study were patients who already had mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease.

The authors say that their findings do not support the use of B vitamins in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease. However, B vitamins are not drugs, they are not magic bullets intended for the treatment and prevention of chronic disease. Their role is in helping to maintain good health.

What must not be forgotten is that B vitamins, including folic acid, B6 and B12 are essential to health. Folic acid is critical for every single process in the body that requires cell division. It is especially important in foetal development and helps to produce key chemicals for the brain and nervous system. Folic acid is a particularly key nutrient for women, yet nine out of 10 women consume too little."² It would be quite wrong to dissuade people from consuming folic acid in recommended amounts. This must not be allowed to happen.

Moreover all B vitamins can be safely taken in recommended amounts. This includes amounts up to and including the safe upper levels and/or likely safe intakes for supplements set by the Expert Vitamin and Mineral Group."

² Henderson L et al. The National Diet and Nutrition Survey. adults aged 19 to 64 years. Volume 3. Vitamin and mineral intake and urinary analysis. London: Stationery Office, 2003.

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