

**THE HEALTH SUPPLEMENTS INFORMATION SERVICE COMMENTS ON
THE BENEFITS AND SAFETY OF VITAMIN E**

21 January 2009 – Further to a new study published in the January issue of the British Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology,¹ HSIS examines the importance of vitamin E in the diet. In this study, the authors reported that maternal intakes of vitamin E, from diet and supplements, were linked with an increased risk of congenital heart defects in the offspring.

Dr Carrie Ruxton, independent nutritionist and scientific advisor to the Health Supplements Information Service (HSIS) expressed concern that the conclusions of the study would unnecessarily alarm pregnant women. She commented: "Vitamin E is an essential nutrient for health and an important antioxidant. The UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS),² shows that considerable numbers of adult women have vitamin E intakes that fail to meet European guidelines². Over 70% of women aged 19-64 years (80% of women aged 19-24 years) consume less than 10mg per day. Average intakes in women are around 8mg per day".

"The new study measured dietary intakes in 276 mothers of children with a congenital heart defect (CHD), i.e. the 'case' group. The results were compared with 324 mothers whose children were healthy, i.e. the 'control' group. The authors linked higher intakes of vitamin E with a greater risk of congenital heart defect (CHD) but average intakes were only 13.3mg in the case group and 12.6mg in the control group – a difference of 0.7mg. Since the diets were measured more than a year after labour using an estimated questionnaire method, we can't be certain that this **tiny difference wasn't caused by measurement error.**

"In addition, vitamin E intakes in both groups were below the US vitamin E recommendation of 15mg per day and considerably below the Dutch safe limit of

¹ Smedts HPM, de Vries JH, Rakhshandehroo, M et al. High maternal vitamin E intake by diet or supplements is associated with congenital heart defects in the offspring. BJOG 2009;116(3):416-423. Published on line 20/01/09. DOI:10.1111/j.1471-0528.2008.01957.x

² There are no recommended dietary intakes as yet for the UK specifically

300mg per day. Since this **study was observational and not a controlled intervention**, and the authors themselves admitted that **“the mechanisms underlying a higher CHD risk for high maternal vitamin E intake are unknown”**, it is **premature to recommend that pregnant women avoid foods and supplements containing vitamin E. Indeed, this could have a detrimental effect in the UK considering that the vitamin E intakes of so many young women do not even meet the modest dietary guideline of 10mg per day”**.

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