



## **THE HEALTH SUPPLEMENTS INFORMATION SERVICE COMMENTS ON VITAMIN TRIAL IN CANCER**

A trial published in the April issue of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*<sup>1</sup> has found that men and women taking a combination of vitamins had a reduced risk of dying that persists for 10 years after taking the supplement. The vitamin combination also reduced the risk of oesophageal cancer in people under the age of 55 years.

In this trial, which was conducted in the Linxian province of China between 1985 and 1991, 29,584 Linxian villagers aged 40-69 years were given daily supplements of one or more of four vitamin and mineral combinations. The supplement which contained 50 micrograms selenium, 30mg vitamin E and 15mg beta-carotene led to decreased mortality from all causes, cancer overall, and gastric cancer, outcomes which were published at the end of the trial.<sup>2</sup>

Commenting on the study findings, Dr Carrie Ruxton from the Health Supplements Information Service notes: "The results in this most recent paper published by Qiao et al, come from following up the Lixian villagers for 10 years after they stopped taking the supplement. During the 5 year duration of the supplementation trial and the 10 years of follow up, the villagers were interviewed monthly about their health and registered cancer deaths were reviewed to look for ongoing effect of the vitamin supplements.

"Ten years after the end of the trial, villagers who had taken the specific selenium, vitamin E and beta-carotene combination identified above, still had a 5 per cent reduction in total mortality and a 100% reduction in gastric cancer. These effects were concentrated in villagers younger than 55 years. Oesophageal cancer decreased by 17 per cent in villagers younger than 55 years too."

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<sup>1</sup> Qiao Y-L, Dawsey SM, Kamangar F et al. Total and cancer mortality after supplementation with vitamins and minerals: follow-up of the Linxian General Population Nutrition Intervention Trial. *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, published on March 24, 2009. doi:10.1093/jnci/djp037.

<sup>2</sup> Blot WJ, Li JY, Taylor PR et al. Nutrition intervention trials in Linxian, China: supplementation with specific vitamin/mineral combinations, cancer incidence, and disease-specific mortality in the general population. *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 1993;85:1483-1492.

Dr Ruxton adds: “Nutritional intakes in the Linxian population were poor and the rates of oesophageal and gastric cancer were high. So, a key point from this study is that correcting nutritional deficiencies seemed to help to prevent cancer. It is difficult to translate this research to the UK where dietary intakes are better than in rural China. However, it is evident from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey that certain groups in the UK have vitamin and mineral intakes below recommended levels. Chronic conditions, such as cancer, develop over decades and prevention needs to focus on a number of lifestyle factors, only one of which is ensuring adequate intakes of nutrients. While this new research is interesting, the primary purpose of vitamin and mineral supplements remains the correction of shortfalls in dietary intakes.”

For more information on vitamins and minerals visit [www.HSIS.org.uk](http://www.HSIS.org.uk)

The Health Supplements Information Service (HSIS) ([www.hsis.org.uk](http://www.hsis.org.uk); Tel: 020 7052 8955) is an independent information body, set up to provide balanced information on vitamins and minerals. It is supported by a restricted educational grant from the Proprietary Association of Great Britain (PAGB).

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