

Does Vitamin E Cause Prostate Cancer?

Robert Pugach, MD

The answer is, surprisingly, that it may. In 2002 The Selenium and Vitamin E Prevention Trial (**The SELECT Study**) was started. It was designed to see whether supplementation with Vitamin or E could reduce prostate cancer occurrences. The rationale was to test claims made over many years that both of those were beneficial and could prevent certain cancers.

In 2008, the trial was prematurely stopped. The reason for that was because there was no prevention benefit noted after the first 5 ½ years of the trial. **More importantly, a safety committee assigned to the trial found some disturbing information – the patients being given Vitamin E seemed to have a higher incidence of prostate cancer than those who were not taking it!**

Let's stop for a moment and comment on clinical trials. They are staggeringly important for physicians and patients. They can validate the benefits of existing therapies, teach us that sacred truths may not be valid and **allow us to develop new treatments in many areas, from pharmaceuticals to medical devices to novel technologies like stem cells and molecular testing of cancer cells.** We are fortunate to live in a country where both industry and government sponsor trials. The information they provide allows physicians to bring forth new treatments that can improve the lives of our patients.

In the past, innocuous substances like Vitamin E were often ignored. Claims that it could help to prevent cancer or heart disease went unchallenged because clinical trials focused on more innovative therapies. **Fast forward to the SELECT trial. Patients taking Vitamin E were found to have a 17% increased risk of developing prostate cancer than those taking placebo!**

Does that mean that Vitamin E *isn't* safe for men to take? Not yet. More studies have to be done to validate these initial findings. That's the challenge with clinical trials – what seems obvious initially isn't always borne out of additional study and research. The lesson is that **it's important not to fall victim to baseless claims about substances and treatments that haven't been proven to work.** It's impossible to watch late night TV and not see ads for substances that will increase a man's testosterone, improve memory, prevent cancer or cause amazing weight loss. **Don't allow yourself to be drawn in!**

Rest assured that I never offer a new treatment to our patients until I am convinced that the medical literature validates its safety and efficacy. That means a lot of travel time to meet with the engineers and scientists of companies and attending meetings to discuss treatments with colleagues, both nationally and internationally.

As always, our focus is on your urologic health. You can rely upon us for safe, leading edge therapies to bring the world of minimally invasive urology to you