

## **The Use of Vitamins in Pakistan**

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Vitamin supplements have been used commonly in complementary or alternative medicine in overall population [1]. Due to increase in population, urbanization and media coverage, consumer healthcare was much likely to rise and hence the vitamin supplement market has been reported as one of the world's fastest developing businesses [2].

Much of our population remains ignorant about the nutritional needs and requirements that are not met due to meager dietary practices; yet, some health-conscious portion of the population do take vitamins and dietary supplements pills and tablets. The Healthcare professionals play a significant part in selection of supplemental products. Some patients request the healthcare professionals to advise them about vitamins and other dietary supplements, and this depends on the personal health habits of the healthcare professional whether they will recommend or not [3]. Some healthcare professionals have specified that it would be wise for adults to take multivitamin daily and possibly some specific nutrients should also be added in order to help protect against some chronic ailments [4, 5].

It has been observed that the Vitamin supplements are frequently misused in Pakistan. They are required in very small quantities for adults and their requirement in infants and children are much lesser on daily basis. If a balanced diet is consumed then it delivers far more amounts of vitamins than required by the human body; and also, a balanced diet delivers calorific constituents, fiber, minerals, antioxidants, etc. Moreover, the human body has huge reserves of a lot of vitamins like Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> for 2-5 years and Folic acid for 6 months. In general, the human body rarely has vitamin deficiency but such deficiencies can be found in very poor people suffering from severe malnutrition. Consequently, such persons require food and vitamins only in small amounts. The artificial vitamin supplements have various chemicals that can be harmful to human body on prolonged use; date expired compounds can be very dangerous. Unluckily, extra-large quantities of vitamins are found in the supplemental products in the market that are not only harmful but they also impose waste of scanty financial means of patients who are fairly indigent. An expert discoursed that Pakistan's hospital sewerages are depots of wasted vitamins [6].

Though many consumers consider supplements to be safe because they are "natural," Unnecessary and irrational use of medicinal and supplemental products has been acknowledged as a public health problem that augmented probability of adverse drug reactions, drug interactions, and unsuitable drug prescribing and amplified costs [7,8]. Efficacy and safety studies of dietary supplements are inadequate and every so often methodologically poor; hence they have displayed conflicting results. Their consumption continues to rise especially in developed countries. Since the use of Vitamin supplements is presumed to be harmless, the patients should be advised on their probable side effects [8]. Nevertheless, there is genuine use of vitamins also. A study was conducted recently to assess the knowledge, approach and practices regarding the use of vitamin supplements in 400 OPD patients in a teaching hospital of Pakistan. It was found that most of the subjects (approx. 85%) consumed vitamin supplements but > 50% were unaware about the harmful effects of the vitamins though 79% of subjects found their consumption to be helpful. Furthermore, majority was unaware of the indications for vitamin supplements' usage [9].

Doctors, friends, relatives, social media and newspapers have been regarded as source of information regarding the vitamin supplements in studies [10]. The use of hidden and growing vitamin supplement

poly-pharmacy together with their uninhibited access is a reason for deep concern [11]. In Pakistan it has posed a substantial public health problem, which is still generally unidentified and not well understood [12] due to meager healthcare indicators and weak infrastructure.

The media and the healthcare professionals should play their role to advise the people in general about the rational use of vitamin supplements. Short/ refresher training courses would also help doctors to remain update. The government should take steps in order to de register Unreasonable, dangerous and money guzzling vitamin supplements; vitamin supplements suggested by the world drug authorities contained in “Essential Drug List” ought to be wisely consumed and promoted.

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