

Overdose of kid's multivitamins can be fatal



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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. — With so much emphasis on eating better, cutting trans-fats from popular foods and reducing salt intake, where do vitamins fit in your daily diet? For many children and adults, a daily multivitamin is a part of the morning routine, but can vitamins be deadly?

Compare a typical bottle of adult daily multivitamins with a bottle of children's multivitamins. The differences are immediately evident. Even before opening the package you can see that the label is designed to grab the interest of kids. Spiderman, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, the Little Mermaid and Hanna Montana are among the familiar characters found on bottle labels. Inside the bottles are even greater temptations: tasty, sweet, crunchy or gummi candy-like vitamins!

In 2008, there were nearly 51,000 calls made to poison control centers nationwide reporting children under the age of 6 overdosing on vitamins, according to the American Association of Poison Control Centers. Vitamin overdose, particularly ones containing iron, can be extremely toxic and even deadly.

POSSIBLE SCENARIO

Consider this scenario: A 4-year-old boy is given a chewy multivitamin with iron every morning by his caregiver. He is allowed to choose the color and character shape. He really wants the red dog and the purple cat, but is told he can only have one. He chooses the red dog. His caregiver carefully places the cap back on and puts the bottle back in the cabinet.

Later, when the boy is alone in the kitchen, he opens the cabinet and takes out the vitamin bottle. He easily opens the safety cap. There's the purple one! And another red one. And a green one, a yellow one, and another red one. Mmmm ... tastes just like Gummi Bears. EEWwww. The orange one is yucky. He spits that one out and it sticks to the counter. Half the bottle is empty now. He puts the bottle back in the cabinet and goes into the living room.

He watches some television and takes a nap on the couch. He awakens with stomach pains and vomits. It's been seven hours since his vitamin binge.

His caregiver hears him crying and vomiting. At that moment, she is in the kitchen trying to figure out what the orange glob is that's stuck to the counter.

She runs into the living room. It's been so many hours since the vitamins were eaten that there's no trace of them in his vomit. He can't stop vomiting and now has diarrhea. Thinking he has a bad stomach virus, she calls the pediatrician.

She wonders again about the orange thing she found. She looks closer and can smell the familiar sweetness and pungency of vitamins. She grabs the vitamin bottle and opens it, finding more than half of them gone. "Could it be?," she wonders.

The doctor answers and she relates the boys symptoms. Then, almost as an afterthought, she says: "I think he may have eaten half a bottle of vitamins — maybe 15 or 20 of them. Could that be a problem?" The doctor tells her to get him to an emergency room immediately.

The boy is admitted to the hospital with all of the symptoms of iron poisoning. He is placed in the intensive care unit for three days and receives a special chemical intravenously. The chemical binds with the iron and it is removed from his body when he urinates.

Several days go by and his organ functions appear normal. He is discharged and goes home.

Vitamins with iron can easily be fatal for a child. This child's caregiver found out early and the vitamins were children's vitamins. But even one adult prenatal vitamin with iron can kill a child.

Other multivitamins can cause illness, organ damage and even death. Talk with your child's doctor about vitamins. For many children, they just aren't necessary. If they are, careful monitoring of the dosages is needed.

If you suspect your child may have taken an overdose of vitamins, call the poison control center at 1-800-222-1222.