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Who Benefits From Vitamins? The Makers and Sellers.



Do you recommend vitamin supplements for healthy people?

CAROL CASSELLA: The majority of recent data would suggest that the main beneficiary of vitamin supplements is the industry that produces and sells them—it's a \$24 billion-a-year business.

Unless you are pregnant or restricted from getting adequate vitamins through your diet or natural sunlight (vitamin D), many studies are showing actual harm resulting from taking supplements. Rather than preventing cancer, antioxidants have led to more tumors in some studies. Vitamin E has been linked to increased risks of prostate cancer. Calcium and vitamin D may increase the risk of kidney stones and heart disease in women but not change rates of osteoporosis—the condition they are touted to improve. That's not to say vitamins aren't important; they're critical to good health and normal function. But over the eons humans were designed to absorb vitamins and minerals from whole foods, not pills and capsules. Science hasn't begun to untangle how individual doses of vitamins affect the body when taken in this laboratory-created and discretely packaged form.

Perhaps we should be spending less money on bottled supplements and more in the produce section of our grocery stores or, even better, on our kitchen gardens.

Dr. Carol Cassella (@CarolCassella) is a practicing physician and author of the novels "Oxygen" and "Healer."