

Response to the BBC Horizon Documentary: Vitamin Pills - Miracle or Myth

“Despite multiple warnings and advice from the HFMA, this BBC investigation unfortunately ignores almost a decade of research from the Government’s far larger (and proportionally more representative) National Diet and Nutrition Survey, as well as advice from the Department of Health, which states that food supplements are an essential requirement for some groups of people with characteristics which put them at risk of nutrient deficiency.”

“These groups cover a huge proportion of the population, including infants and young children, women pre-conceptually and during pregnancy, and the over 65s.”

“For everyone else, findings from the latest National Diet and Nutrition Survey¹ show that a large proportion of UK adults may not be achieving adequate vitamin and mineral levels, because they do not follow fundamental healthy diet guidelines.”

“Alongside the fact that just 15% of women and 13% of men are eating the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables, it is important that serious consideration be given to responsible supplementation to maintain good health.”

“We should all try to eat as healthily as possible, and supplements are not a replacement. However, supplementation is essential for some groups² and for thousands of individuals across the UK, these products also help to safeguard nutritional intakes and achieve optimum micronutrient levels.

Response to BBC Horizon’s investigations into high dose antioxidant supplement use

Much of the high dose antioxidant research referenced in this programme has come under significant criticism from a wide range of scientific experts, and the antioxidant levels given in the trials exceed the established safe upper levels for vitamins and minerals, and in some cases, were given in levels already known to be toxic, far from those levels found in consumer products.

The European Food Safety Authority has assessed the safety of antioxidant supplements and safe upper levels have been set which all UK supplement manufacturers adhere to.

With regards to exercise, Professor Ristow’s own paper refers to other studies that have reported conflicting findings to his own. As with all health claims relating to food supplements on sale in the UK, any claims made on antioxidant products for the protection of oxidative stress in cells during exercise have been the subject of rigorous assessment by the European Food Safety Authority, and approved by the European Union.

¹ A recent diet and nutrition survey by the Food Standards Agency found that only 30% of adults and 41% of older adults met the “5-a-day” recommendation
² The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends certain supplements for some groups of people who are at risk of deficiency, including:

- Folic acid supplements during pregnancy
- Vitamin D supplements should be taken by all pregnant and breastfeeding women, children aged six months to five years, people aged 65 and over, and those who are not exposed to much sun
- All children aged six months to five years should take a supplement containing vitamins A, C and D

ENDS

Issued on behalf of:

HFMA

Issued by:

Pegasus

Press enquiries:

Vicky Flannigan or Duncan Mackenzie-Reid

Victoria.flannigan@thisispegasus.co.uk or

Duncan.mackenzie@thisispegasus.co.uk

The HFMA

The Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) is the voice of the UK's natural health industry and represents more than 125 manufacturers and suppliers of natural health products. Founded in 1965, the HFMA is a not-for-profit organisation which operates long-standing codes of practice to ensure that member companies adhere to high standards and offer good quality, safe products supported by responsible, lawful information.

For further information about the HFMA, visit www.hfma.co.uk.