

## VITAMIN KNOWLEDGE AND VITAMIN SUPPLEMENTATION IN TEENAGERS

D.G. HENDERSON and D.R. WOODWARD\*

Relatively little is known about vitamin supplementation among Australian teenagers. We report here a survey of 245 students in grades 11 and 12 from the Tasmanian city of Launceston. We investigated knowledge about vitamins, usage of vitamin supplements, and the possibility of a link between knowledge and supplementation.

Overall, 33% of students reported using vitamin supplements (mainly vitamin C or multi-vitamin preparations) at least once per week, while 28% had never used supplements. (These values are similar to those from previous surveys of Tasmanian high school students [Lewis and Rayner, 1978; Lynch et al. 1981].) There was no significant difference in usage between boys and girls, between home economics students and other students, or between biology students and other students.

Students were vague about the roles of vitamins (in response to an open-ended question). About half (48%) saw them as needed, in an unspecified way, for good health. Some indicated more specific roles: for growth/development (20%), to "fight" infection (9%), to prevent specific deficiency diseases (5%), or to provide energy (4%). Gender, biology study and home economics study all had little effect on the popularity of these answers, except that biology students showed significantly greater awareness of the growth/development role.

Regular users were significantly more inclined to see vitamins as needed for "fighting" infection, but otherwise did not differ from other students in their views on vitamin roles.

Students saw only a limited range of foods as rich vitamin sources (again, in response to an open-ended question). Most listed fruits (87%) and vegetables (83%). Other types of foods were listed much less often: meats (20%), milk (9%) and eggs (8%), with no other type more than 5%. Girls were significantly more likely to list fruits and vegetables than boys. Study of biology or home economics had little effect on frequency of listing food types.

Regular users did not differ from other students in their perception of specific food types as vitamin sources.

We conclude that regular users of supplements do not differ markedly from other students in their beliefs about the roles of vitamins or about the vitamin content of foods.

LEWIS, I.C. and RAYNER, K.J. (1978). Med. J. Aust. 2: 632.

LYNCH, P.P., WATERS, M.J., WOODWARD, D.R., KIRK, I., JAMISON, S., MACLEAN, A., REID, P. and ROCKCLIFFE, W. (1981). Panorama 3(1): 25.

---

\*Biology Department, Launceston College, Launceston, Tasmania, 7250  
Biochemistry Department, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Tasmania, 7001