NEW CAUTIONS FOR VITAMIN E PRODUCTS

Vitamin E refers to a group of fat-soluble antioxidants that act in the body to protect against cell damage and play a role in maintaining the body's immune system and other body processes. The only claims currently allowed for vitamin E supplements by Health Canada are: it’s a factor in the maintenance of good health; it’s an antioxidant for the maintenance of good health; and (for products delivering more than the Recommended Dietary Allowance [RDA]) it helps prevent vitamin E deficiency.

Health Canada does not permit claims that any vitamins can help prevent or cure diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, or cancer; however, media reports in recent years have suggested that high potency vitamin E supplements might be helpful in all these cases. As a result, many people have been using vitamin E with expectations that it could be beneficial for these conditions.

In June 2009, Health Canada completed an extensive review of recent clinical research on vitamin E and concluded that supplementation with high doses of vitamin E not only fails to prevent heart disease and cancer, but may actually harm certain people.

One study found that patients with heart disease or diabetes who took 400 IU of vitamin E daily for an average of seven years were at a significantly increased risk of heart failure compared with patients who were not taking vitamin E supplements. This study concluded that high-dose vitamin E supplements (400 IU or greater) should not be taken by patients with heart disease or diabetes.

In another study, daily doses of 400 IU of vitamin E were given to patients receiving radiation therapy for cancers of the head and neck. The theory was that the antioxidant treatment might reduce the incidence of additional cancers of the same type among these patients. However, it was found that those who received vitamin E supplements were significantly more likely to develop other similar cancers during the supplementation period than those receiving a placebo.

Health Canada conceded that all these studies have limitations, and that it’s difficult to interpret how the results might apply to healthy people taking high doses of vitamin E. Although there are justifiable concerns over certain at-risk groups of consumers (i.e., people 55 years or older who already had heart disease or diabetes; people with cancer or who previously had cancer; and people who may be at higher risk of developing these diseases), more research is needed, especially focusing on the long-term use of high-dose vitamin E supplements.
In spite of the uncertainty about the effects of high-dose vitamin E supplements on normal, healthy people, starting in January 2010 Health Canada will require all higher-potency vitamin E supplements to carry some new caution statements on their labels as follows:

1. For products providing $\geq 180$ mg AT* (268 IU) per day: Consult a health care practitioner prior to use if you have cancer. (Meyer et al. 2008; Bairati et al. 2005; Bairati et al. 2006).

2. For products providing $\geq 268$ mg AT* (400 IU) per day: Consult a health care practitioner prior to use if you have cardiovascular disease or diabetes. (Ward et al. 2007; Winterbone et al. 2007; Lonn et al. 2005).

3. For products providing $\geq 360$ mg AT* (535 IU) per day: Consult a health care practitioner prior to use if you are taking blood thinners. (Not relevant to Shaklee products.)

\*AT = alpha-tocopherol.

Most Shaklee products that deliver vitamin E contain daily dosages that do not require the new cautions, so only our Vita-E® 400 Plus capsules will be affected. The following statement will be added to our current label: “Cautions: consult a health care practitioner prior to use if you have cancer, cardiovascular disease, or diabetes.”

References used by Health Canada in determining the first two caution statements:


