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Multivitamin use and colorectal cancer incidence in a US cohort: does timing matter?

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Multivitamins contain several nutrients, including folic acid, that are hypothesized to reduce the risk of colorectal cancer. Previous studies suggest that multivitamin use may reduce colorectal cancer risk but only after a long latency period. The authors examined the association between regular multivitamin use (four or more times per week) and colorectal cancer incidence among 145,260 men and women in the Cancer Prevention Study II Nutrition Cohort. Current multivitamin use was reported on a questionnaire at enrollment in 1992-1993. All participants had also reported multivitamin use on a questionnaire completed for a different study approximately 10 years earlier (in 1982). The authors observed 797 incident cases of colorectal cancer during follow-up from 1992 to 1997. After multivariate adjustment, regular multivitamin use at enrollment was not associated with risk of colorectal cancer (rate ratio = 1.04, 95% confidence interval: 0.87, 1.23), whereas regular multivitamin use 10 years before enrollment was associated with reduced risk (rate ratio = 0.71, 95% confidence interval: 0.57, 0.89). Regular multivitamin users 10 years before enrollment were at similarly reduced risk whether they were still regular multivitamin users at enrollment or had stopped. These results are consistent with the hypothesis that past, but not recent, multivitamin use may be associated with modestly reduced risk of colorectal cancer.