

HOW TO TAKE VITAMIN

Taking high doses of vitamin C is controversial, but it may be the quickest way to stop a cold, says Patrick Holford

EVER SINCE THE DAYS when Nobel Prize winner Dr Linus Pauling championed the use of vitamin C as an effective treatment for the common cold, it has been a focus of controversy. Last summer, a comprehensive review of 30 placebo-controlled studies, involving 11,350 participants given at least 200mg of vitamin C per day, seemed to show that taking vitamin C was a waste of time. But the results of this review, far from proving that vitamin C is no good, help us understand when best to take it. gram of vitamin C a day or less. But the greatest benefit of vitamin C has been found in studies in which participants have been given high doses (four to eight grams) immediately at the onset of symptoms.

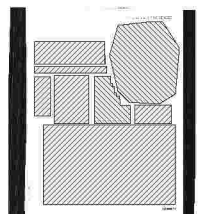
In one of the most recent studies by Hemila in 2006, half the volunteers had a cold that lasted for only one day when taking eight grams of vitamin C per day. In a second trial, participants were given six grams a day for five taking cold medication. The vitamin C worked twice as well as the drugs.

From this evidence, it would seem that taking vitamin C every day has a small benefit on the duration and severity of symptoms, but the



'The potential for a swift recovery is more promising when high doses are taken immediately'

Patrick



There are also benefits to your skin, energy, arteries and mental health

Headed by Dr Harri Hemila from the University of Helsinki, the committee found that taking daily vitamin C for prevention doesn't significantly reduce the number of colds, except in studies with athletes, soldiers and skiers – those under physical or cold stress. The review did report, however, that there was a 'consistent benefit in the duration of colds, with the effect greatest in children'. The average reduction in duration was 13.6 per cent for children and eight per cent for adults across all doses. This equates to up to a month less 'cold' days per year for the average child. The net result is that daily vitamin C does not reduce the number of colds, but it does reduce their duration and severity.

In most studies covered by the review, participants were given one

days, within 24 hours of the onset of symptoms, and this halved the duration of the cold from seven days to three and a half days, compared to those

potential for a swift recovery is more promising when high doses of vitamin C are taken immediately at the onset of a cold. ■

Your vitamin C prescription

As stated earlier, this is a controversial subject, and not everyone will agree. But if you want my own advice – and the action I take – then read on. Some people will get loose bowels at these high doses, so adjust accordingly.

● If you already have a cold, take one gram of vitamin C twice a day, four to six hours apart, for the duration of the cold. While this may only slightly reduce the duration and severity, there are many other

benefits – energy, skin, arteries, mental health, to name a few. Also eat five to eight servings of fruit and veg a day, which would give you about 200 to 500mg of extra vitamin C.

● If you feel a cold

coming on, take two grams at the onset of symptoms, followed by one gram mid-morning, one gram mid-afternoon, one early evening and two grams before going to bed, for three to five days.