

18. With regard to multivitamins:

18.1. The advert uses a quotation from the New York Times to claim that a study published in the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) found that 'daily doses of multivitamins slow down the disease and cut the risk of developing AIDS in half.' However, the study in the NEJM (2004 Jul 1; 351(1):23-32) is selectively cited and did not purport to make such findings.

18.2. The NEJM study did however find that a multivitamin supplement containing vitamins B, C and E delayed the onset to AIDS in pregnant women in Tanzania. 24.7% of the study group taking the vitamins developed AIDS compared to 31.1% of the study group who despite taking a placebo also developed AIDS. It did not cut the risk of developing AIDS in half; though it did delay the onset of AIDS in approximately 21% of the sample group. There is no evidence that it reduces the risk of developing AIDS – and certainly not by half.

18.3. Furthermore, it is premature to project the result of the NEJM study which was conducted on Tanzanian pregnant women. It is not clear that a result for this cohort is applicable to other populations or to the South African population.

18.4. At most, the particular multivitamin supplement of vitamin's B, C and E might have some effect in delaying the onset of AIDS. Once a person develops AIDS however, ARV treatment is clinically indicated. The conclusion of the NEJM study itself is: "Multivitamin supplements delay the progression of HIV disease and provide an effective, low-cost means of delaying the initiation of antiretroviral therapy in HIV infected women." We would not object to an advertisement that makes such a claim, but the advert that is the subject of this complaint goes much further than this.

18.5. The tone and style of the advert conveys the impression that multivitamins are a much more effective treatment of HIV/AIDS than they actually are. For example, the advert states "The Treatment Information Group and the Dr. Rath Health Foundation have launched a public education programme to break the silence about the natural answer to AIDS." This statement is misleading because there is no proven, safe and effective 'natural health' answer to AIDS."

18.6. The advert further states that the NEJM study found that "inexpensive multivitamin treatment is more effective in staving off disease among HIV-positive women than any toxic AIDS drug." This statement is misleading and false. There are a range of ARV medicines, including AZT, which have been shown to be effective in suppressing HIV. As stated previously, the most generous possible interpretation of the study is that it is possible that multivitamins (vitamins B, C and E to be precise) are slightly effective in delaying the onset of AIDS for the general population.

18.7. The NEJM study referenced above states "The benefits with respect to immunologic and virologic outcomes in our study were small relative to the benefits of triple antiretroviral therapy."

18.8. The advert also refers to a study conducted in 1990 that an optimal dose of vitamin C can block replication of HIV by 99% (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 1990 Sep; 87(18):7245-9). The study was not conducted on

humans and has no validity as a claim for the efficacy of multivitamins as a treatment for HIV/AIDS. It is therefore a misleading reference.