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Editorial and Business Offices:  
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(202-785-2255)

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Cover: Healthy Canadian harbor seals. A new study involving their European kin suggests that pollution may render this and other marine species vulnerable to contagious — and potentially lethal — infections. (Photo: Daryl Boness/Natl. Zoological Park)



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Science Service, which publishes SCIENCE NEWS, is a nonprofit corporation founded in 1921. It gratefully accepts tax-deductible contributions and bequests to assist its efforts to increase the public understanding of science, with special emphasis on young people. More recently, it has included in its mission increasing scientific literacy among members of underrepresented groups. Through its Youth Programs it administers the International Science and Engineering Fair, the Science Talent Search for the Westinghouse Science Scholarships, and publishes and distributes the *Directory of Student Science Training Programs for Precollege Students*.

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## Letters

### Antioxidant interaction?

In "Beta-carotene may lower vitamin E stores" (SN: 5/14/94, p.310), you report that Frommel and colleagues conclude that beta-carotene decreases the concentration of vitamin E in the body.

This conclusion does not follow from their data. Many questions remain, for example: Did the beta-carotene facilitate the utilization of vitamin E selectively in the cancer-polyp group? Do we know the rate of utilization of vitamin E in people who have colon cancer or polyps versus people who don't? Where did the vitamin E go and how was it utilized?

These questions need to be addressed before Frommel's study can be evaluated.

James Kessler  
Los Angeles, Calif.

Perhaps vitamin E and beta-carotene need each other to act as antioxidants and are used up in the process. Adding beta-carotene would force more antioxidation to take place, using

up both beta-carotene and vitamin E and causing the low vitamin E supply to become a limiting factor.

For many vitamins, the symptoms of overdose are the same as those of having too little of the vitamin. This may be due to "using up" another nutrient that is necessary for the vitamin to do its thing.

Stephen Wood  
Orlando, Fla.

### Smoking out truth

The studies cited in "The Great Nicotine Debate" (SN: 5/14/94, p.314) are all well and good, but you left out important evidence of the addictiveness of cigarettes — namely, the reactions of people who do or did smoke. Ask them how incredibly strong is the urge to smoke when they've been without for only a little while. As a past smoker, I know very well how difficult it was to stop.

To see the CEO of a tobacco company quoted as saying that "smoking is no more addictive than coffee, tea, or Twinkies" makes me wonder

just what kind of people are in these positions. He ought to be ashamed of himself, he shows so little regard for truth.

Ron Bianco  
Providence, R.I.

I am a registered respiratory therapist, and I have seen patients, friends, neighbors, and my father die of lung cancer. All said they wished they had never started smoking.

People surely have the right to smoke; however, they should be fully cognizant of the dangers of smoking, not endanger others with secondhand smoke, and pay all medical costs associated with their use of tobacco products.

Greg Snyder  
Norfolk, Va.

Address communications to:  
Editor, SCIENCE NEWS  
1719 N Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20036  
All letters subject to editing.

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