



FREMONT DAVIS

Cereals offering all the daily vitamin needs are unnecessary unless cereal is the only source of nourishment.

PUBLIC POLICY

# Money Wasted on Unneeded Vitamins

by Barbara J. Culliton

"Feel vitamin safe all day," the television sings, glorifying a breakfast food. And it sings true.

If you eat one of the vitamin rich cereals for breakfast, you may very well get what they offer—100 percent of your body's minimum daily requirement of vitamins and minerals. You will also pay up to 20 cents more a box for it. And your body will quietly but efficiently excrete most of the vitamins you feed it at lunch and dinner.

**It is possible**, however, that this kind of excess may soon be restricted by law. The Food and Drug Administration has proposed regulations governing the promotion and sale of dietary supplements and vitamin-enriched foods. More important than cereals, common multiple vitamins and exotic health foods are also being asked to stand up and defend themselves against FDA claims that the manufacturers are deceiving the American housewife.

Back in 1941 the minimum daily requirements for vitamins and minerals were promulgated by the Government to educate the public.

Implying that if getting the minimum is good, getting ten times as much is ten times better, drug companies and food manufacturers offered pills containing up to 900 times the mdr of various nutrients, as well as foods concocted from 90 ingredients—more than the body is known to need—all in the name of good health, and all at a price.

**The human body**, however, is not easily taken in by exorbitance. It is demanding, but not greedy and having used all the nutrients it can, and stored all it can comfortably and safely hold, it asks no more. And, because it uses vitamins and minerals mainly to metabolize food, it is not always grateful for being stuffed with little red pills, food supplements or food substitutes, instead of rich red meat.

The question of nutritional needs was re-evaluated a couple of years ago

by scientists at the National Academy of Sciences who issued revised standards they call the recommended dietary allowances that look at physiologic needs and average living conditions in the United States, as well as variations among individuals. On the basis of this information, the Academy's nutrition board set its recommended allowances below the more commonly used minimum daily requirements, but still set levels ample enough to meet every normal need. For example, the mdr for vitamin A is 4,000 units but the Academy's recommendation is 1,250 units of the same vitamin.

**And, so, armed** with evidence from the prestigious Academy and with some evidence of its own, FDA has proposed regulations to limit the vitamin-mineral content of some foods and change the labeling and advertising of others—or both. Commissioner James L. Goddard is taking a big jump into the arena of food economics. He is certainly carrying out his mandate from the President's Advisory Council on Consumer Interests to protect the buyer from the seller.

If FDA's proposed regulations become reality, companies that put out vitamin supplements and health foods will be more materially hurt than some of the major producers whose products would be only slightly altered. However, even the bigger manufacturers are objecting to the proposals.

General Mills' Total and Kellogg's Special K, to cite two well-known examples, are now fortified with eight vitamins—vitamins A, niacin, thiamine or B<sub>1</sub>, riboflavin or B<sub>2</sub>, B<sub>6</sub> and B<sub>12</sub> and vitamins C and D. The proposals would limit the composition of these cereals to thiamine, riboflavin, niacin and iron on the theory that the consumer gets the rest of what he needs through other foods and is only wasting his money paying for them in cereal.

At this point controversy flares sky

high. There seem to be three camps, each arming itself for the inevitable and drawn out battle of a public hearing and possible court fight where, in all likelihood, no one will win and few will really lose.

**Some nutritional** scientists, including members of the Academy, argue that recommended dietary allowance are indeed met by persons eating three varied meals a day, but reasonable as this sounds, a significant segment of the population does not eat wisely. Therefore, they say, leave vitamin fortified foods alone.

Other anti-FDA factions say, "Sure the people are wasting their money, but so what? It's free country."

Anyone can say and many do, for example, that vitamin C taken in massive doses helps prevent colds. Ill advised people are free to spend thousands of dollars a year to buy it. However, because there is not one whit of sound medical evidence to back up this myth from the women's pages of newspapers, anyone who advertises vitamin C pills as cold preventatives can be prosecuted by FDA, which clearly has authority to ban deceptive advertising.

**This kind of power** over non-prescription drugs and foods is power enough for FDA, critics say; let Goddard keep his personal philosophy on the free enterprise system to himself.

But James Goddard is not easily put down. He wants labels on fortified foods that say "in prominent type," "Vitamins and minerals are supplied in abundant amounts in commonly available foods. Except for persons with special medical needs, there is no scientific basis for recommending routine use of dietary supplements." Somebody, Goddard's office says, must tell the consumer that he does not really need all the fortification television says he does, and that somebody, according to the Commissioner, is FDA.