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business

## Vitamin supplements a bitter pill

Worried vitamin companies defend their industry after a Danish study concluded supplements may be harmful

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Jay Smith of Denver shops Monday at the Vitamin Cottage at 2375 15th St. Protandim, a product that aims to increase the body's ability to make antioxidants, is made by LifeVantage of Greenwood Village. (Post / Photo illustration by Brian Brainerd)

Dozens of vitamin companies, including two in the metro area, are defending their products following a Danish study last week that suggested vitamin supplements might do more harm than good.

Big money is at stake.

The U.S. supplement industry recorded \$21.3 billion in sales in 2005, up from \$20.3 billion in 2004, according to the Nutrition Business Journal.

LifeVantage Corp., a publicly traded company based in Greenwood Village, said it worries that sales may suffer because of growing skepticism about vitamin supplements, officials said.

"The danger is that a lot of potential customers will throw the baby out with the bathwater," said Dr. Joe McCord, director of science for LifeVantage.

The company sells its product under the brand Protandim, which retails for about \$50 for a 30-day supply.

Denver-based VitaCube, doing business as XELR8, said a large chunk of its more than \$2 million in annual revenue comes from the sale of vitamin and mineral supplements, said Sanjeev Javia, vice president of business development.

"There may be more studies like this," said Javia, whose company has a market capitalization of \$17 million. "But people aren't dissuaded."

Javia questioned the Danish study. He said its findings were based on studies that tracked the usefulness of using vitamin supplements to treat people with diseases - not as a preventive measure.

"I don't know of any good (supplement) company that says their products can cure anything," said Javia, whose vitamin drink Bazi sells for about \$120 for a six-bottle case.

The Danish study released last week concluded that antioxidant supplements did not improve users' health and could increase the risk of death in some cases. The study, known as a meta-analysis, based its findings on 68 previously published clinical trials.

"Oxidative stress is implicated in most human diseases," the study read. But the researchers "did not find convincing evidence that antioxidant supplements have beneficial effects" on health and that "beta carotene, vitamin A and vitamin E seem to increase the risk of mortality."

Antioxidants are found in foods such as blueberries and broccoli. Vitamin supplements are intended to fill the gaps in people's diets.

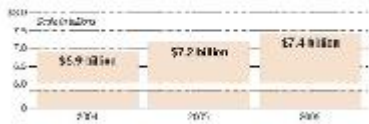
"You should try to get it from food, but that's harder and harder these days," said Jay Smith, 39, while shopping Monday at a Vitamin Cottage store in Denver. Smith, an artist, said he would continue taking antioxidant pills and other herbal supplements.

As many as 160 million people in North America and Europe use the type of supplements analyzed in the Danish

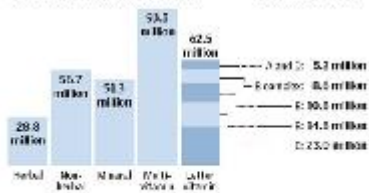
## Supplement industry growing

The supplement industry in the United States has grown 10% since 2005, according to a new study. The industry is expected to reach \$21.3 billion in 2010, up from \$17.4 billion in 2006.

### U.S. vitamin sales estimates



### Total supplements and vitamin units sold in the United States, 2006\*



\*Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health and Medical Examination Survey, 2006. \*\*Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, National Health and Medical Examination Survey, 2006. Source: Department Resources, Inc., The Accidental Vitamin Addict, Business Journal, Thomas McFay, The Denver Post.

study, published in The Journal of the American Medical Association.

Other studies have shown that taking vitamin supplements improves health, especially supplements containing vitamin C or selenium, said Stephen Lawson, a director at the Linus Pauling Institute at Oregon State University.

"This was just a statistical manipulation," Lawson said of the Danish study.

He said the Danish analysis discounted the findings of two studies that showed vitamin supplements decreased mortality rates. He said "the overall results may have been different" had those studies been given more weight.

A trade group for the makers of supplements said the study "misuses meta-analysis methods to create generalized conclusions that may inappropriately confuse and alarm consumers who can benefit from supplementing with antioxidants," the Council for Responsible Nutrition said in a statement.

Members in the trade group include Archer Daniels Midland, BASF Corp. and General Nutrition Centers Inc.

McCord of LifeVantage said its product, Protandim, is different from most vitamin supplements on the market. He said Protandim seeks to increase the body's ability to produce antioxidants.

LifeVantage reported fiscal 2006 sales of \$7.2 million, up from \$2.4 million in 2005, according to its latest regulatory filing. It has a market capitalization of about \$6.6 million.

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