Is supplemental vitamin E helpful in the treatment or prevention of cardiovascular disease (especially strokes and heart attacks)?

There has been an ongoing debate about this issue for a number of years now, with conflicting advice being offered to date. However, a recent study was done using a computerized search of seven large trials that studied the effectiveness of vitamin E in the treatment and prevention of strokes and heart attacks.

Six of the seven trials showed no significant benefit of supplemental vitamin E on the outcome of strokes, heart attacks, and cardiovascular disease in general. Unfortunately, many people are being encouraged to spend money on a treatment that has not been shown to be beneficial. Furthermore, the use of such a treatment that is without benefit, and which is readily available over the counter, may detract from the use of proven remedies. This may also lead to a false sense of security, and the failure to implement proven lifestyle changes that are beneficial.

It is thought that supplemental vitamin E reduces the healthy high-density lipoprotein (HDL-2), which is itself protective against cardiovascular disease. It is also important to note that this analysis refers only to supplemental vitamin E; it does not discourage the consumption of foods rich in antioxidants (including vitamin E) that have been shown to be of significant benefit in cardiovascular health.

This is, again, a lesson in using all things good in moderation. Sometimes this is more difficult than avoiding all things harmful!

Allan R. Handysides, M.B., Ch.B., F.R.C.P. (c), is director of the General Conference Health Ministries Department; Peter N. Landless, M.B., B.Ch., M.Med., F.C.P.(SA), F.A.C.C., is ICPA executive director and associate director of Health Ministries.