

The 14 worst health news stories of 2022 (part two)



Last week, I gave you the first half of my list of the worst health news stories of the year. This week, I'm back with part two! So without further ado, here are seven more health news headscratchers from the past year:

8. Melatonin "scourge": Expressions of concern abounded this year over Americans' unprecedented use of the sleep supplement melatonin. Small wonder, given the stress and circadian rhythm disruption associated with Covid lockdowns. It was claimed that accidental melatonin ingestion by children resulted in thousands of calls to Poison Control; my analysis found that most were false alarms after parents discovered that junior got into the melatonin gummy stash. Nevertheless, I sat down with Dr. Deanna Minich to explore the safety and utility of melatonin, with the conclusion that its benefits may go well beyond sleep and jet lag, rivaling those of vitamin D.

9. Stop taking vitamin D already! (*Forbes*) After a flawed *New England Journal of Medicine* study revealed that vitamin D fell short of statistical significance in preventing osteoporosis, a tsunami of anti-vitamin D articles were published. A venomous editorial in the *NEJM* that accompanies the original paper opined: "People should stop taking vitamin D supplements to prevent major diseases or extend life." I countered with an interview with vitamin D researcher Dr. William Grant who

explained why some studies have failed to demonstrate the benefits of vitamin D, and why this essential nutrient should be considered far more than just a “bone supplement”, with impacts on immunity, inflammation, cancer, blood sugar regulation, muscle performance, and heart disease.

10. Alarmist Covid stories: “Infectious Covid virus can stay on some groceries for days” highlights one, hearkening us back to the days when we would swab down our DoorDash deliveries with toxic disinfectant. We now know that, while Covid can remain on surfaces, it’s nearly exclusively transmitted via the aerosol route. Another lurid story making the rounds has it that corpses can transmit Covid; simple hand-washing should alleviate the possibility of transmission, which has never even been demonstrated. Then there’s one about how unvaccinated persons have more traffic fatalities. Is the implication that you better get vaccinated, or else die in a traffic accident? The authors acknowledge that unvaccinated people may simply be bigger risk-takers—but then go on to suggest that insurers might consider applying discriminatory rate hikes to vaccine refuseniks!

11. Why are you taking a multivitamin? (Harvard Health) The article, which is authored not by a Harvard physician but by a health writer with a B.A. in biology, concludes: “For most Americans, a daily multivitamin is an unnecessary habit.” This adds to the drumbeat of anti-supplement media that this year has accompanied a campaign to regulate and restrict access to natural health products. Had the author actually read the study that she cites as evidence that multivitamins are worthless, she would have noted that it acknowledged “multivitamin use was significantly associated with a lower incidence of any cancer.” Furthermore, the validity of negative multivitamin studies is undermined by the poor quality of supplements used (e.g. Centrum®), the studies’ short duration, participants’ questionable compliance, and biased statistical analysis. I recently tackled the shibboleth that multivitamins are a waste of money in this article.

12. “Misinformation”: It’s now been revealed that Twitter and other social media giants suppressed truthful posts about Covid, from controversial views about masking, lockdowns, and vaccine mandates as well as stories highlighting the vaccine’s limited efficacy and serious side effects. What makes this even more insidious is that it did so with coordination from government agencies. As early as 2020 it was convincingly argued that “Scientists who express different views on Covid-19 should be heard, not demonized”. Nevertheless, in a moral panic, California passed legislation that will subject doctors to professional discipline for sharing medical “misinformation” that doesn’t echo the party line. It’s already being challenged in the courts as an unconstitutional abridgment of free speech.

13. Go vegan to save the planet?: In the wake of the EAT-Lancet report, which advocated drastic reduction in animal protein consumption to improve human health and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the anti-meat crusade persisted in 2022. A report by Stanford and UC Berkeley scientists claimed that phasing out animal agriculture represents “our best and most immediate chance to reverse the trajectory of climate change.” Dismissing over a million years of hominid evolution, the researchers opine that a 15-year transition to a global plant-only diet “would create a 30-year pause in net greenhouse gas emissions and offset almost 70 percent of the heating effect of those emissions through the end of the century.” But I noted that critics admonish:

“If the current public health message advising moderate consumption of red meat as part of a healthy balanced diet is replaced by the message that any intake of red meat is harmful, this change will probably adversely affect iron deficiency anaemia, sarcopenia, and child and maternal malnutrition—these conditions and their associated risk factors are already responsible for considerably greater global

disease burdens than a diet high in red meat, particularly in low-income and middle-income countries.”

Nor are the climate benefits certain, according to Jayne Buxton, whose book, *The Great Plant-Based Con: Why eating a plants-only diet won't improve your health or save the planet* was the subject of a recent *Intelligent Medicine* podcast episode. Only a small fraction of global greenhouse gas emissions can be attributed to livestock, and innovative methods of regenerative agriculture can mitigate its carbon footprint. But powerful interests in Big Food and Big Agriculture stand to reap huge financial rewards from meatless mandates—without dirigiste climate edicts, insect protein and Impossible Burgers might be hard for the public to swallow.

14. Supplements don't work for Covid: The powers-that-be continue to deny the role that nutritional supplementation might play in blunting the impact of the pandemic. Under “*Debunking Covid 19 Myths*” The Mayo Clinic writes, “Many people take vitamin C, zinc, green tea or echinacea to boost their immune systems. But these supplements are unlikely to prevent you from getting sick.” *Health.com* reported that “*Taking Vitamins and Supplements Won't Help Reduce Your Risk of Dying From COVID-19*” and that “Vaccines remain the only proven way to protect against severe disease.” The CDC continues to admonish “Dietary supplements aren't meant to treat or prevent COVID-19,” and “The best way to obtain these nutrients is through foods.” Admittedly, studies conclusively proving the efficacy of supplements against Covid were scarce as the pandemic got underway. And you could get banned by social media or sued by the Federal Trade Commission for merely writing about natural products for Covid. But in 2022, restrictions eased somewhat, and more well-designed studies are now substantiating the obvious role of nutrition in supporting resilience and hastening recovery, with the emerging prospect that they might help to resolve Long Covid.

With that, I wrap my last article of 2022. I want to thank you all for making *Intelligent Medicine* a part of your health journey, and I look forward to sharing more health news with you in the New Year!