

# BUSINESS INSIDER

## A 4-year-old who overdosed on vitamins reveals why we should never have told people to start taking them



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A 4-year-old boy in England was recently taken to the emergency room after he'd spent weeks vomiting and losing weight.

After tests revealed the boy had extraordinarily high calcium and vitamin D levels, one of the boy's parents told doctors that they'd been feeding him 12 different dietary supplements, including a mixture of vitamins, oils, and minerals.

The boy's blood calcium level was almost twice the range considered normal for someone his age, and his vitamin D level was more than 20 times the normal level, according to a

[detailed case report published](#)

[Thursday in the BMJ](#). The boy had autism but no previous health issues, according to the report.

These vitamin levels can be dangerous and toxic. Most children don't need to be given supplements (if you're considering feeding them to your child, talk with your doctor first). "Multivitamins aren't necessary for most healthy children who are growing normally," Dr. Jay Hoecker, an emeritus member of the Department of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine at the Mayo Clinic, [writes on the Mayo Clinic website](#).

And it turns out, most adults don't either.

**We should be getting most of our nutrition from the food we eat, not from powders or pills.**

Decades of research into people of many ages have failed to find any substantial evidence that vitamins and supplements do any significant good. In adults, several supplements have been linked with [an increase in certain](#)



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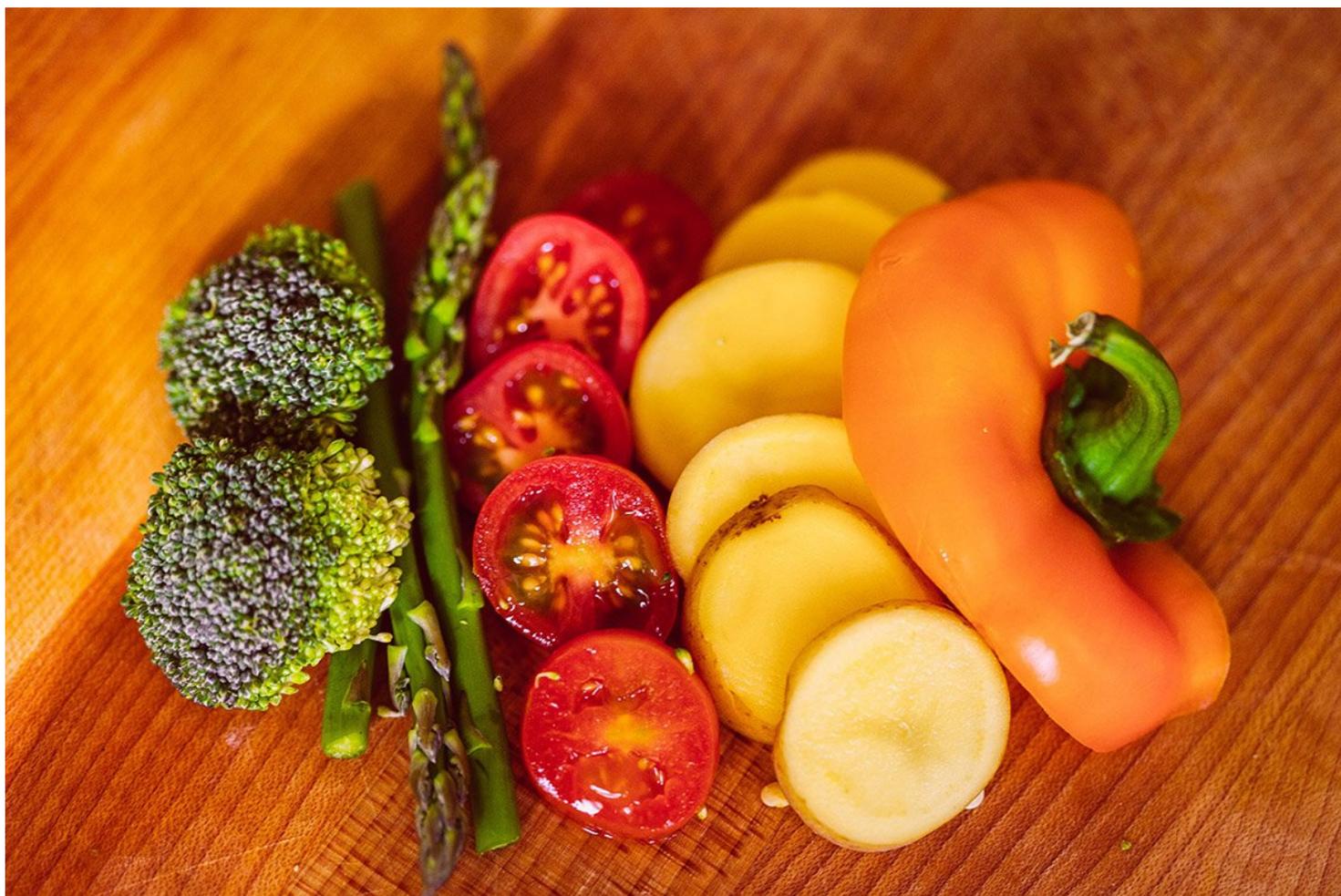
cancers, while others have been associated with a [rise in the risk of kidney stones](#). Others have been tied to an [overall higher risk of death](#) from any cause.

"We use vitamins as insurance policies against whatever else we might (or might not) be eating, as if by atoning for our other nutritional sins, vitamins can save us from ourselves," science writer Catherine Price writes in the book "[Vitmania](#)."

Unfortunately, they can't.

## **Instead of vitamins, focus on eating less red meat, fewer sweets, and more fruits and vegetables.**

New [USDA guidelines announced in January](#) echo these recommendations. In addition, several leading nutritionists and [public health experts](#) recommend incorporating more healthy fats — like those from avocados, oily fish, and nuts — into your diet.



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These basics are a good place to start:

- **Keep vegetables as the cornerstone of your meals.** Or, in the words of the [famous journalist and food writer Michael Pollan](#): "Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants."
- **Snack on nuts.** Since they're high in protein, nuts can help stabilize blood-sugar levels — which, if they plummet, can make healthy people feel "hangry" (hungry and angry) and is especially dangerous for people with diabetes. Nuts are also a good source of fiber, a key nutrient that helps aid digestion and keeps us feeling full.

- **Cut back on added sugar and refined carbs.** Diets that are high in sugar and refined carbs (white rice, sweet snack foods, white bread) and low in whole grains (brown rice, whole wheat) [have been linked with health problems](#), while diets high in whole grains and low in refined carbs tend to be linked with more positive outcomes.
- **Incorporate oily fish, like salmon, into your diet.** Salmon is rich in omega-3 fats, which help protect our cell membranes, the structure protecting the inner components from their outside environment. They're also the building blocks of the hormones that regulate blood clotting and [inflammation](#).
- **Eat avocados.** While they're high in fat and calories — just half of one packs 120 calories, about the equivalent of a slice of bread — avocados are low in sugar and rich in fiber. So add a few slices to your next meal.

As it turns out, all of the above foods are rich in various vitamins and minerals. Most [green, leafy veggies](#) are high in vitamins A, C, and E; colorful peppers and carrots are rich in vitamin A; fish and [nuts](#) are high in omega-3s; and avocados are a great source of potassium and vitamins C and E.

With this knowledge, writes Price, "we might rediscover something both surprising and empowering: that, while nutrition itself is amazingly complex, the healthiest, most scientific, and most pleasurable way to eat is not that complicated at all."

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