

I have received several inquiries about the web site <http://www.multivitaminguide.org> which has published a rating of the top 100 multivitamins. Some of your were a bit surprised by the comparisons and have asked me whether they were valid. I have seen many ratings of multivitamins over the years. Most of them come from questionable sources and have little or no validity. So I reviewed this web site with a healthy skepticism.

The opening paragraphs sounded impressive. For example, they said:

"The guide offers scientific comparison of 100 multivitamin brands, including popular supplements such as Centrum, One-A-Day, Kirkland, Herbalife, Shaklee, Nutrilite/Amway, Equate, Nature Made, NOW Foods, Melaleuca, Puritan's Pride, TwinLab, and Walgreens." "The information on this site is the result of over 6 years of scientific research and analysis. Each of the reviewed multivitamins is evaluated against 14 key parameters, such as potency, bioavailability, and antioxidant strength."

"Then each supplement is assigned a score ranging from 0 to 10, which enables you to easily compare the effectiveness of the different brands and helps you determine for yourself what the best multivitamin to take is." While that sounded good I found it a bit unsettling that their was no "About Us" page to identify the group who was making these comparisons; no list of scientific advisors; and no list of the published studies on which they based their recommendations.

When I looked at their ratings I found it a bit curious that Centrum, which most people consider the best of the drug store brands, received a rating of 0.6 (99th out of the 100 multivitamins rated). In addition, several multivitamins that I considered to be quite good received only mediocre ratings, while multivitamins that I had mostly never heard of were rated near the top. I was really curious by this point at just how they had arrived at these ratings. So when I got to the bottom of the page I clicked on the link "How were these vitamin reviews made" with some anticipation.

Again, I was disappointed. There was no information on how they assessed things like bioavailability or toxicity (which were listed among their 14 comparison criteria) and no list of scientific references. It appears that their sole comparison criterion was a list of what they considered to be the optimal doses of each vitamin and mineral. And when I reviewed that list it was pretty obvious why there were no scientific references listed. There was no sound scientific basis for the "optimal" dose list.

For example, their recommendation was for 7500 IU of vitamin A. The DV recommendation for vitamin A is 5,000 IU, and most experts recommend that half of that come from beta-carotene to avoid the risk of bone fractures caused by high doses of vitamin A.

They recommended over 50 mg of vitamins B1, B2, niacin, pantothenic acid and B6. That is up to a 33-fold excess of DV recommendations. There is no scientific rationale for such a huge excess of B vitamins.

On the other hand their recommendations were significantly below current DV recommendations for other nutrients like vitamin D, biotin and iodine.

In summary their recommended "optimal doses" made no scientific sense, and they provided no published clinical studies supporting their recommendations.

In my opinion the entire comparison is bogus.

It is impossible to say who is behind this misleading comparison, but when these types of comparisons have surfaced in the past it usually turned out that they were designed to make a particular product look good - and the easiest way to do that is to make the ingredient list of that product the standard against which all others are compared.

I'll let you do your own research as to which product that might be.

In the meantime it is important to remember that the Internet is the electronic equivalent of the wild west. Just because you see it on the web doesn't make it true. You need to view what you see online with a bit of skepticism. Ask the hard questions. Look for the scientific evidence.

To Your Health!
Dr. Stephen G Chaney