The Unexpected Danger of Synthetic Beta Carotene

By Eddie Stone

The founder of Touchstone Essentials, Eddie Stone now serves as the company’s chief executive officer. Eddie Stone and Touchstone Essentials offer individuals an alternative to chemically derived food supplements: products derived from whole foods.

Many nutritional supplements and vitamins contain synthetic beta carotene, the precursor of [vitamin A](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vitamin_A%E2%80%8E), but ingesting this product can result in serious health problems. Vitamin A is essential to the body, as it plays an important role in vision, immune functions, and skin health. The body can convert beta carotene into vitamin A as needed, making it more desirable than cod liver oil and high-dose supplements that can cause vitamin A toxicity. The regular intake of beta carotene reduces risk for Alzheimer’s disease and breast cancer, among other benefits. Unfortunately, a Finnish study, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, and conducted in a double-blind, placebo-controlled environment, demonstrated that synthetic beta carotene may actually increase one’s risk for cancer.

Supplement manufacturers are not required by law to disclose whether they use synthetic vitamins or not. Individuals can still tell by looking at the label. If the label lists vitamin A pamitate, retinyl acetate, or vitamin A acetate, the supplement is using synthetic vitamin A. The whole food containing beta carotene must appear on the label if it is not synthetic.