



# VITAL

THE VITAMIN D AND OMEGA-3 TRIAL

## Participant perspective: “What does VITAL mean to me?”

### VITamin D and Omega-3 Trial (VITAL Study)

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We are interested in knowing what motivated you to join VITAL—and why you think it is important to continue participating until the study is over. Please let us know via e-mail or postal mail. Below is a sampling of participant responses received to date:

“I think this study is important because of all the conflicting information you hear from advertisements to word-of-mouth advice from well-meaning friends and relatives. I don’t like spending money for pills that may not have any benefit. I know people who spend lots of money for pills which they believe are necessary for good health.” **Steven C.**, of Ohio

“Participating makes me feel that I’m contributing data that could help people in the future.” **Thomas O.**, of New York

“I have been committed to my participation in the VITAL study because of its design, breadth, and execution. Through the enrollment process, including blood samples, daily consumption of study capsules, periodic memory testing, and communication from VITAL’s leaders, I’ve felt very involved, informed, and dedicated to upholding the promise of the study. I look forward to knowing what has been learned once results have been assessed and published.” **Peter S.**, of Kansas

“Like so many others, I know someone with cancer. The toll on our loved one, as well as the rest of us, has been devastating. If my taking two pills a day for five years can make even the tiniest difference in finding a cure, it is an honor and privilege to do so.” **Carrie H.**, of Kansas

“I wanted to participate in the VITAL study because the males in my family have a history of coronary artery disease. It is my hope that in some small way my participation in the VITAL study will help others prevent heart disease.” **Bill W.**, of Texas

“I started the VITAL Study 5 years ago when I read that there is very little research into cancer in African-American women. Very few African-American women engage in the types of research studies used to determine how cancer ... develop[s] and especially how to prevent cancer. ... The time on this study has gone by very fast as taking the required pills became a part of my daily life. I am very pleased to know that because of my consistent efforts to take the pills and remain a part of the VITAL study, research has continued towards the prevention of cancer and possibly other diseases. I am very



proud to be a part of this study and I sincerely pray that this study will be valuable for our generation, for future generations, and especially for African-American women.” **Theresa S.**, of Virginia

“I participate in your study because I believe in the importance of preventing illness, and because my mother and sisters had cancer and heart problems, and I hope studies such as yours will help prevent these in the future.” **Edith B.**, of Virginia

“I have been participating in the study since the beginning and consider it a privilege and obligation to fulfill my agreement to complete this study. I am glad to be a part of something that will provide us with a better understanding of these illnesses and what we can and perhaps cannot control.” **Rochelle O.**, of New York

“As a statistician by profession I understand the importance of clinical trials and am proud to participate in this one. When I explain I’m in this trial people sometimes say, ‘Aren’t omega-3 and vitamin D [supplements] important for you?’ And I say, ‘No one really knows. That’s why millions are being spent—to find out whether there’s a benefit.’ ” **Alan G.**, of New Jersey

“I enlisted to help you with the study because I feel it is important to research the use of natural supplements and vitamins. Also I have the time since I am retired now and I want to ‘give back’. I continue to take the pills as faithfully as I can because I made a commitment to your organization.” **Larry G.**, of Indiana

“I wanted to participate in a long-range study for a long time, and I was delighted to be invited to participate in VITAL. The goal was good, and I knew I would be accurate in following the regimen. ... I have never missed more than 3 pills a month, and I am really looking forward to seeing the results. Thank you for doing this study. I’m hoping it will move science farther along the road to answers.” **Eileen D.**, of Tennessee

“VITAL study participation was an automatic ‘yes’ with my work before retirement as a registered dietitian in a hospital and retirement home ... I was and am most interested in future knowledge of needs for all (including myself) in staying healthy. ... Health now and in the future is a priority, striving one day at a time with a positive attitude and consuming my study pills at every breakfast.” **Lucille K.**, of Michigan

“As a new nurse in the ‘60’s I truly admired those brave souls who participated in the early chemo[therapy] days. Their willingness to ‘help someone in the future’ by taking those drugs impressed me greatly. The valuable work you are doing is important to the longevity & quality of life for this next generation. I have been faithful in this project by the simple act of taking the pills. Too easy!! I hope to live a long time. Once the results of the study are compiled I may be adding some vitamin D & omega-3 supplements. At 72 it’s looking good. Look out 100 ... here comes Margaret P...!” **Margaret P.**, of North Carolina

“While I have been blessed with excellent health I lost a parent to cancer and my mother suffered the effects of a stroke for the last 15 years of her life. Taking two pills daily for a few years is a small effort if it will further the knowledge and understanding of [vitamin] D<sub>3</sub> and omega-3 fatty acids in relation to [these health conditions]. I am eager to see what is learned from this study and honestly it will be enough if it is learned that these



two play no role (which seems unlikely). Eliminating possibilities is knowledge! Thanks for all your hard work—what I do is simple: swallow two pills daily.” **Luke C.**, of Georgia

“As a dietetic technician, I am well aware of the impact nutrition has on our health. The science is out there that we can prevent many of the diseases that affect us with proper nutrition. Anything I can do further that knowledge is important to me. There is too much hype out there and we need the science if we want to age in a healthy manner. I believe your study will help us achieve that. Thank you for allowing me to participate. I am now traveling and carrying my packets for the rest the year in my luggage.” **Julia C.**, of New York

“As a former biomedical researcher, I understand the importance of adherence to research protocols. Toward that end, I am pleased to say that I have not missed a single dose, even while traveling, during my years of participation in the VITAL study.” **David B.**, of Oregon

“I have a scientific background, and am generally appalled by small studies whose results are overblown in news reports and over-believed by both lay people and many doctors. This is particularly true in nutrition and supplement studies. ... Thus, I was pleased to volunteer for a study with sufficient robustness that I could believe the results--as my contribution to science. I’m waiting, with great curiosity, for the results.” **Lita N.**, of Massachusetts

“The reason I decided to participate in the VITAL study program was simply for the satisfaction of knowing I could play a part in an effort to advance mankind’s knowledge. I believe in what you are striving to accomplish and your method of approach. We will all be a little better off and a little more knowledgeable of the world around us because of your efforts and I’m thankful to have been able to contribute to your program.” **George P.**, of Nevada

“In November 2011, I began the study and have been very diligent in taking the daily pills. The reason I was willing to participate was that if someone could be helped in preventing certain types of illnesses, I’d be willing to be used. My mother had a stroke at 56, as well as another one at 77. I’ve always been conscious of my health and hoped that I wouldn’t have the same fate. Also, I have been the Executive Director of a large retirement facility ... for 40 years and seen many different types of health issues. One of the saddest is the early onset of dementia, which has many forms. If this study would be a step toward delaying the deteriorating of the mind, I wanted to be a part of it.” **John L.**, of Kansas

“I am a scientist and believe in the scientific process to help learn about our world and ourselves. It is vital that we continue the study to give accurate and measurable results. I am a woman and believe that this study will help women learn more about themselves, especially in areas where they differ from men and where past studies have treated women based on studies of only men. I am looking forward to the results in 2018!” **Dian L.**, of Minnesota

“The VITAL study will provide scientific evidence of the benefits or lack thereof of vitamin D and omega-3s. As I am fortunate enough to have benefited from previous



studies that have helped save lives and longevities, I felt compelled to pay back to society and science.” **Ernest K.**, of Georgia

“I decided to join the VITAL study because it seemed very well-designed, having such a large amount of participants over such a good length of time. As a person trained in science, I have been motivated to participate in VITAL because I would like to know the answer to whether fish oil has a benefit. It appears many people have been willing to pay quite a bit of money to ingest fish oil and other supplements, and I think VITAL may actually provide the answer as to whether they are really gaining a real benefit. Thank you for allowing me to be a member to such a vital study!” **Mary D.**, of Florida

“[T]he reason why I wanted to participate in your study is because I truly believe that without these studies advances in medicine would be nearly impossible. I commend the researchers who conduct these studies and I would like to do all I can to help. Taking the study meds has become a part of my daily [routine]. I [will] actually miss taking them when [the study is] over.” **Delores T.**, of New York

“Just wanted to be a part of something that might contribute to the health and well-being of the general population.” **Darrel D.**, of Missouri

“The first reason I joined VITAL was because I was invited. The second, and most important, reason was because I have always wanted to make a contribution to the increase of knowledge, whether in general science or in the medical field. While my career did not give me an opportunity to do this, I had done so as a student in the Boston area, volunteering for studies at Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School and other places. It had been many years since I could offer my services, if only as a guinea pig - so I was delighted when this chance came along. I only hope it gives clear evidence, one way or the other, of the effectiveness of these treatments. I look forward to seeing the results of these studies and what my small contribution has been.” **Daniel T.**, of Arizona

“I’ve been blessed with good health, marvelous children and a satisfying life. One of the ways I express my thankfulness is to participate in health studies. The VITAL study has been effortless; I only hope significant information is gleaned from it.” **Elsbeth N.**, of California

“[T]hank you for the effort you have undertaken in this research. Heart disease, stroke, and diabetes are a problem for African Americans and others as well. I am glad to be a participant in a study that might contribute to finding a cure for these diseases or to controlling them with a better understanding of how these diseases affect people regardless of ethnicity. I am taking my meds as directed.” **Larry H.**, of Mississippi

“Research studies are a way to learn what works and what doesn’t, so I was very willing to participate when asked to take part in VITAL. Being diligent in adhering to the daily pill routine has not been difficult as I recognize the need for good data. I also respect the fact that conducting a broad-based, long term study such as this is expensive.” **Mall B.**, of Washington



“I participate because there is a disappointing amount of poor data or no data alleged to support some popular recommendations. I am pleased to participate in a well-designed, adequately-powered study.” **Michael R.**, of Virginia

“I chose to participate in the VITAL study because of the high interest in vitamin supplements and the shortage of credible studies. There is a lot of marketing based on little more than anecdotal evidence. My doctor recommended one supplement that had shown some promise (he was taking it himself) but then an NIH [National Institutes of Health] double-blind study found that the supplement had no statistically significant effect and he told me that. I wanted to help gather the same definitive information regarding vitamin D and fish oil supplements.” **Glenn D.**, of Connecticut

“As an African American, I wanted to participate in the study, to contribute to the understanding of the ways to prevent certain diseases. I know that African Americans are often underrepresented in such studies.” **Delores N.**, of Illinois

“I decided to join the VITAL study because I understand the importance of doing clinical studies. I worked as a clinical research nurse at a major teaching hospital in Chicago for over 20 years. I encourage my family and friends to participate in any clinical trials they can. Even if you receive a placebo, you are helping future patients by the information the study receives for control information.” **Helene L.**, of Illinois

“Back in the 50’s my dad participated in a diet & heart study. It required that my mother had to order specially packaged food for the entire family of 12 and prepare meals consistent with the program guidelines. My mother had to be creative to make the bland meals tasty and enjoyable. The dedication my parents demonstrated to support the study prompted me to accept the invitation to participate in the VITAL study. I’m anxious to learn the results and to find out if I have been taking vitamins or placebo.” **Francis L.**, of Massachusetts

“My parents both died from complications of strokes. In addition my father had heart disease. Any study or research that would help the quality of life or prolong life for us important to me. Taking a couple of pills a day does not seem like a burden to me. I hope the study proves to be of value to our future health and welfare.” **Theodore P.**, of Oregon

“Even if it doesn’t benefit me, I want next generations, including my own family, to benefit from the results. That is why I also joined the Women’s Health Initiative many years ago and take part in various small projects as I learn about them. It is also one of the most useful ways to volunteer.” **Judith B.**, of North Carolina

“I joined VITAL because I thought it would be interesting to participate in a real scientific study to see how it works from the inside, and also because I felt good about doing some small part in adding to body of knowledge regarding possible preventive measures for cancer, stroke and heart disease. Even if it turns out that, no, neither vitamin D nor fish oil have any beneficial impacts in preventing those diseases, at least it will put to bed any questions, and allow research dollars to be spent looking elsewhere. Of course, the REAL reason I couldn’t say ‘no’ to joining VITAL is that I knew JoAnn [Manson] from high school (go Tigers!).” **Douglas B.**, of Massachusetts



“Over the years I have had many friends and family who touted the use of various herbal treatments and homeopathic items to ‘prolong life’, ‘be healthy’, ‘get more energy’. Some of these folks were quite persistent. I have not jumped to conclusions about ‘New’ forms of treatment. I have a skeptical and scientific mind that doesn’t believe the claims often made about some new combination of enzymes, herbs, foods or supplements. Yet, I do not dismiss them either. There may be some validity in some of those claims. Consequently, when I somehow heard about and joined the VITAL study, part of my intent was to participate in a project that might shed light on whether some of these claims might be beneficial. We are quite complicated creatures, and while many of the ingredients in these claims probably are beneficial, my doubt is that they are not as critical as to go to the expense of a particular pill or drink. I am much more wholistic and prefer to eat a variety of foods in moderation.” **Larry F.**, of California

“VITAL to me means something very important. I wanted to participate in the study for a couple of reasons. One is of course the desire to possibly assist in ways to prevent devastating illnesses and also for a selfish reason—that of possibly preventing those issues from affecting me. A win-win as the cost is 0 and the inconvenience minimal. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of the study.” **Jacquita C.**, of Florida

“I joined the study simply to be one of thousands of people who want to add to the knowledge of man.” **William E.**, of Alabama

“I get a sense of satisfaction by participating in the VITAL study. Taking 2 pills a day requires little effort, and if in doing so I can further the understanding of medical science, why wouldn’t I? I appreciate the chance to contribute in this way.” **Valetta S.**, of Kansas

“I have been a faithful participant in this study since the beginning. ... Being a retired nurse, I was glad to help with anything making medications better understood and safer.” **Gloria S.**, of Nebraska

“I participate because I think of myself as a ‘marginal outlier’ who should be represented in your data. I am 70 years old, 70 pounds overweight and have a nightmarish family history of heart related problems, but work out two to three hours a day Monday thru Friday (one hour each on strength, aerobics, and flexibility). I have never really been sick and don’t plan to follow that path. Signs of aging are there, but pretty minor. My goal is to get run over by a train while out jogging on my 110th birthday (because I couldn’t hear it coming).” **Robert B.**, of Kansas

“Certainly the most important factor is that it [participation in VITAL] is so easy. Neither the routine nor the occasional calls for self-reporting are at all demanding. Another reason is that I assume the study will not lead to any patentable discovery. So it probably depends on pure volunteers to happen at all. Finally, of course, reducing the burden of disease is a great thing.” **Harry A.**, of New Jersey

“Many of my friends and family spend hundreds of dollars taking various supplements on the off-chance that they will do some good—based, as far as I can understand, on anecdotal evidence of dubious value. I am happy to participate in a study large enough,



long enough, and rigorous enough to provide useful information on the value of two widely consumed supplements. I'm looking forward to the results." **Susan N.**, of California

"... I joined [VITAL] because I thought that by participating, I might be helping to further science and knowledge and that that knowledge might be of help to someone in the future. I hope that I live long enough to read the results of this study." **Rexford S.**, of Minnesota

"I am a chronic do-gooder. Like I was a Den Mother (I am male) when my kid was in Cub Scouts." **Jonathan C.**, of Massachusetts

"We are pummeled daily with dietary advice based on hunches, wishful thinking, anecdotal evidence, and plausibility arguments. This profusion of dietary fads reflects our society's intense hunger for nutritional wisdom. The only known reliable source for the desired knowledge, though, is carefully conducted, placebo-controlled trials like the VITAL study. Such studies require a huge amount of work, but if someone else is willing to take on all the challenges of organization, funding, logistics, analysis, and so on, I'm delighted to do my small part to contribute to the production of one modest nugget of scientific gold-standard nutritional knowledge. It is, after all, the only way to make progress." **Peter P.**, of California

"Throughout the years I have seen the harm done to women who received drugs and treatment that had not been clinically tested to be safe or effective for them --heartbreaking thalidomide stories, the damage of unwarranted hormone replacement therapy, etc.. Additionally, even when clinical research did exist, participants in studies often did not include women. Results from the all-male studies were assumed to apply to women as well, sometimes to their detriment. For me, it is a great privilege to participate in this study so that women and men can benefit from the findings. Thank you for the opportunity." **Sally R.**, of Arizona

"I have a gut instinct that the study will prove that taking vitamin D and omega-3 fatty acid[s] do nothing to prevent cancer, heart disease and stroke but that such knowledge will be useful going forward." **Michael Z.**, of Massachusetts

"I volunteered for this study because I was neutral about both vitamin D and omega-3. I've always wanted to contribute to a study but found the demands impossible with my professional life. This study was something I could do. I'm ready for the end, but your regular communication has been just enough to sustain motivation and interest." **Emily S.**, of Pennsylvania

"I am a retired nurse, and I think studies like this are important. However, because I live in Fairbanks, Alaska, I never thought I could be involved in one. (I thought you had to live near a big medical center, and I'm sure that for some studies you would have to.) When I heard about this study that could be done by mail, I jumped at the chance. So far, it's going well. I take my pills regularly, and I'm so glad that we'll get to hear about the results eventually." **Ann S.**, of Alaska

"For years my doctor kept saying, 'But there have been no large double-blind studies on.....' whatever supplement I ask him about. The VITAL Study, [which I] started with



my doctor's permission, allowed me to be a part of the process. Also, the involvement of Brigham [and Women's Hospital] and Harvard provided confidence that this was a very serious project." **Richard D.**, of Virginia

“As someone who's always been interested in medicine, I've long thought that one of the most egregious sins of modern American healthcare is its failure to put more emphasis on prevention. The VITAL Study struck me as an excellent attempt to give us new insights into how to protect our health before we're afflicted with disease. I'm honored to play a tiny part in what I hope will someday be a salutary new mindset about our whole approach to health.” **Merrill M.**, of Arizona

“I feel and have felt all along that I am contributing to the health and well-being of all women by participating in this study. It has been an honor.” **Julie B.**, of California

“My wife is a lung cancer survivor and because of this I was exposed to the importance of clinical trials to further the exploration of causes and cures for diseases such as cancer and others.” **Rick M.**, of California

“I am a gay HIV-positive long-term survivor. When I was approached to participate in the VITAL study, I viewed it as a possible way for me to show gratitude for the life I'd been granted. I was diagnosed with HIV in 1986. Two partners and hundreds of my friends perished due to AIDS. I continued to live. And I felt compelled to take part in the VITAL study to help learn more about cancer, heart disease, and other life-threatening conditions.” **Dennis D.**, of California

“I have always participated in studies that are done to see how various meds and/or activities interact/affect the function of our human bodies and illness/syndromes. I feel that it is very important to learn as much as possible to improve future generations' health and body functions.” **Marlene V.**, of Kansas

“I chose to take part in the study partly to add to the research on cancer but also because of the amount of cancer and heart disease in my family. My father died of colorectal cancer and my mother of heart disease. Also my wife had breast cancer, [which was] fortunately caught early during a routine mammogram and [is] now in complete remission after six years. Also, a good friend of mine, who likewise was a part of this study, recently passed away with brain cancer. Any research that will help eradicate this dread disease is welcome and I am proud to be a part of this study. I look forward to the results ...” **Bob H.**, of Georgia

“I participate in this study because I want to make a difference in the study of cancer and heart disease. It is a small but invaluable contribution to a body of knowledge that will help someone someday. It is exciting to be a part of this and to make a difference.” **Carolyn D.**, of Washington

“I was approaching retirement when I started. This study seemed like a good way to continue making a small contribution to the community, passive though it may be. Having started, I feel committed to keeping it up, although participation is hardly a burden. Medical Science is certainly a useful field to make a contribution to.” **Steven E.**, of New York





“I am 78 years old and have been blessed with incredible health my entire life. I have had relatives that have struggled with various diseases and, because of that, I felt that if I could contribute to improving the health of other people, it would be worth taking a pill or two every day! I don't think I have ever missed [taking the study pills] in all the years of the trial.” **Everett J.**, of Iowa

“I am interested to know if taking vitamins and supplements really make a difference. My husband and I disagree. He takes several OTC [over-the-counter] vitamins. I don't. I asked my doctor when I first received your information what he thought. He said if I was interested go ahead. He is also interested in the results.” **Anthea P.**, of Georgia

“I decided to participate for several reasons: (1) I have tremendous respect for the organization/hospital that sponsors the study, and knew I could trust the researchers' reasons and methods; (2) I was taking no supplements or vitamins because OTC [over-the-counter] supplements are confusing and so often contain additional ingredients that cause me stomach problems, so decided I might as well try some (or one or none as they could be placebos) from a reputable source, and ... (3) I support the efforts for women's health information being done through VITAL. If omega-3 and/or vitamin D can be shown to assist our resistance to stroke, heart disease, and/or cancer (or not), I will be proud to have been a part of those valuable findings.” **Virginia B.**, of Ohio

“As a biostatistician, I was often involved in the design and analysis of randomized trials. I welcomed the chance to be 'on the other side' for a change, with VITAL. ... I am interested in learning the study results and think that they should be 'the last word' on this question because the sample sizes are so large. It's also been fun to see how the VITAL staff encourage continued participation. I, of course, will keep it up to the end because my taxpayer dollars will have been wasted if enough participants don't continue until the final assessment.” **Paula D.**, of Washington

“I was pleased when asked to participate in this study and I hate to see it end. There is a wonderful feeling of altruism when you do something that possibly benefits people who are completely unknown to you. And with such little effort. I will miss hearing from the doctors in charge and miss the connection I feel with people all over the country who are participating.” **Joan C.**, of Illinois

“I ... started and continue to take my capsules daily, respond to your questionnaires and return the bloodwork samples so that my participation could contribute to understanding ways to prevent cancer, heart disease, and stroke.” **Mary F.**, of Wyoming

“I have continued to participate in VITAL all these years, and will continue to do so, for the same reason: I want to participate in research designed to study women, and specifically to study diseases that affect women.” **Pamela P.-H.**, of Oklahoma

“At the time I signed up I had no concept of the length of the study nor much of an understanding of its importance. As the study went on, I came to better understand the commitment I had made and the good it could do. Now that it is coming to an end, I appreciate having had the chance to be a part of something that could lead to helping others in the future. I am proud of myself for sticking with the program and taking those 2



pills every day. I must admit, I will miss the pills and the small daily routine of taking them. Thanks for the chance to be part of the study, I enjoyed it.” **Roger M.**, of West Virginia

“I have never participated in a study of this kind and the subject matter is interesting. As an African American, I think it especially important to participate in these kinds of studies even if they are not directly focused on a particular group. However, I think the findings are more representative of the population.” **Warren B.**, of Maryland

“I am motivated to participate in the VITAL Study because of the high incidence of cancers in my immediate family. My father and three of his siblings died of cancer, as well as my brother and sister. I am privileged to participate in this study that may help others avoid these health issues.” **James M.**, of Maryland

“I chose to participate in the VITAL study because, as a health-care professional, too often I see treatments ordered or at least suggested based on prior practice but not on documented research. I would like to know unequivocally whether it is efficacious to order vitamin D and/or fish oil for my patients. In my opinion, this study will answer those questions and I am honored to be a part of it.” **Margaret P.**, of Massachusetts

“How can one not do something that will increase our knowledge about what works and what doesn’t? I feel honored to be part of this [study].” **Jan D.**, of Minnesota

“Directors: One reason I agreed to participate in the VITAL study was that together you and I might learn more about avoiding cancer, heart disease and stroke. I admit, too, that the study’s regimentation appealed to the slightly OCD aspect of my personality (my wife of 53 years says it’s more than slight). Finally, I have this faint hope that one or both of the study pills could positively affect cognition. All that being said, I will be most disappointed to learn that I have been faithfully taking two placebos, but even if I have, I understand the importance of that in the overall study.” **Warren L.**, of Alabama

“I am not even quite sure why [I] decided to ... [participate]. However, for more than twenty years now I have subscribed to Discovery and Scientific American magazines and have frequently read articles that were based on various research and studies similar to what I am participating in. Also, I had just finished reading a book on longevity that was based on long-term health and life-habits surveys when I received the request to participate. And I think that had an influence on me. Since then, I have been taking the two capsules long enough now that it has become a regular lunch time habit.” **Ron L.**, of Ohio

“I was motivated to participate in the VITAL study because I felt that I would be contributing to important research on disease prevention. I worked with older adults as a social worker and was dismayed at the number and cost of medications most of them were taking. There seems to be so much focus on treatment and too little on prevention. I have tried to use healthy diet, exercise and natural supplements to maintain my own health, so I was excited to help with such a long-term comprehensive research project using vitamin D and fish oil. I definitely want to continue to the end of the study and hear the findings. I am also curious to find out if I have been taking the placebo or the supplements. I have faithfully taken my pills for 5 years, and they went with me on trips



to Alaska, the Caribbean, the Baltic Sea and many States. I haven't had any problems with the pills and no major health issues. I also have appreciated being able to easily reach someone by phone at the study if I had any questions and getting the newsletters. I wish you much success with the study and look forward to hearing more." **Marion W.**, of Florida

“Though all of my relatives on both sides lived to be 84 or longer, all died of heart failure and several had bypasses during the later years of their life. I am taking the pills to see if there is a way to forestall or delay the heart disease that seems to run in my family.” **Emerson L.**, of Iowa

“I want to contribute to understanding ways to prevent cancer, heart disease, and stroke. I enjoy participating in medical research.” **Walter S.**, of Illinois

“I joined the study because I think women have been underrepresented in clinical research. The study has been a simple and interesting way to help address that inequity. Thanks for conducting VITAL.” **Mary H.**, of Illinois

“There is too much medical ‘advice’ based on poor data or no data at all. Thus I am pleased to participate in a well-designed study with a good sample size and duration of follow-up. I eagerly await your results.” **Michael R.**, of Virginia

“As a science teacher, I have always tried to teach students how to tell if a study was legitimately carried out. When I was contacted to participate in VITAL, I was delighted to see how well it was designed, and how easy it was for people to participate. So I signed up right away, and told several of my friends about it, too! The purpose of the study, and of the sub-studies I have been asked to join, are really worthwhile. It is a pleasure to be part of it! My pills have travelled around the US, including Hawaii, and to China!” **Patricia V.**, of Michigan

“Before I retired this summer, I taught research methods to undergraduate health science students. I explained the importance of randomized clinical trials and the advantages of longitudinal designs. I used VITAL as an example of a double blind study. Some of my students were amazed that I would be willing to take the pills for five years without knowing for certain what I was taking. Maybe it helped them think differently about participating in research.” **Martha N.**, of California

“I decided to participate in this study because it was a very easy thing to do that might provide some helpful information about preventing heart disease, cancer or stroke. Unfortunately, we all know people close to us who have dealt with these issues. I intend to keep taking the pills until the end of 2017 and will look forward to the results that you publish. I hope we all learn something from this.” **Virginia S.**, of Wisconsin

“I decided to take part in this study as my Mother had cancer and passed away at age 54 because of it. ... This was in 1965 before some of the modern treatments. So if my taking the real or the fake pills can help someone with one of the diseases listed, I felt I should do in memory of my Mother. I have lost several friends to this nasty disease and hope your study will help get rid of it.” **Hilda K.**, of West Virginia



“My motivation for taking part in the VITAL Study is quite simple, merely a desire to be of assistance in the search for information that will hopefully benefit folks like myself, older people who wish to do everything they can to prolong a healthy life. In an odd sort of way, it is reminiscent of being a Boy Scout where one is reminded to ‘do a good turn daily.’ On a small scale, taking the capsules daily seems to provide a feeling of having taken part in an ongoing worthwhile endeavor. A note on my calendar reminds me that I began taking the pills on September 10th, 2012 & I am really surprised at how quickly the ensuing four years have gone by. At this point, taking the capsules daily seems like such a familiar ritual that I will miss this phase of my day when the [study pill taking is over] ... Being an avid traveler, I have carried the packets as I walked across Spain on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, NW Spain and had them with me as I traveled on the Trans-Siberian/Trans-Mongolia this past summer, a journey via a series of trains from Helsinki to Beijing. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to be a part of this very beneficial project.” **Bill W.**, of Illinois

“I participated in the VITAL study to assist in the expansion of our knowledge base about these supplements. Do they promote health, have no effect, or harm health? It is a question worth answering, if possible. I look forward to receiving the study’s results. Thanks for the opportunity to participate.” **Stephen S.**, of Michigan

“I joined VITAL—and am taking [the] study pills faithfully—because I want to contribute to understanding ways to prevent cancer, heart disease, and stroke. That is what motivated me to join VITAL—and why I think it is important to continue participating until the study is over. I worked at Penn State, a research university, and so I know that getting volunteers as subject[s] in a research study is important. And my graduate degree is in nutrition, so I have a professional interest in the answer.” **Linda M.**, of Pennsylvania

“I joined VITAL because of the importance and scale of the research that was undertaken. I am a University Professor with some acquaintance of research and I felt the study was an important effort to enhance our understanding of supplements in diet and their role (if any) in preventing disease. This understanding is predicated on a robust sample and full participation of those in the study which is why I think it important to continue participating until the study is over. My pills have traveled with me all around the world and I’ve grown quite attached to them. Depending on your results, I may be adding them to my daily routine on my own! I believe your efforts at communication with the participants have fostered a personal investment in this project and you are to be congratulated on its success.” **Nancy S.**, of Illinois

“I was honored to be asked to participate in this study. I’ve not missed a single dose and at 66 my health is excellent. It is my intention to continue this run and look forward to seeing the results as well as to find out what type of dose I was taking.” **Randy L.**, of Tennessee

“First, my wife is an epidemiologist, so I am extremely aware of the need for participants in large-scale studies of this kind. Second, I am always skeptical of the effectiveness of dietary supplements for improving health. I think Americans waste billions of dollars on supplements with no scientifically proven value. However, I do think there may be a tiny fraction of these supplements that could be effective, so I welcome any controlled study that can sort out those few from the crowd.” **Daniel H.**, of Massachusetts



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“I have always been interested in medicine. When I received the invitation to participate in this study, I jumped at the chance. I want to be able to help in the understanding of health and the human body as much as I can.” **Margaret B.**, of Arizona

“I started the study simply because I could. I knew that I met the requirements and believed I would be able to stick to the program and help build the body of data needed. Yes, it is important to me to support a study that seeks a better understanding of how our daily habits can predict and prevent heart disease and stroke; since both my sister and my mother suffered strokes, I had a special interest in that particular aspect of the study. I have continued in the study in part because I believe in finishing what you start, but also because there is a sense of pride that comes with supporting such research. My wife and others in my family are aware of my participation, and together we are all curious what the research will reveal. And ultimately, I am interested in my own health; whether I'm taking fish oil and vitamin D, or I am part of the control group, just the awareness of my habits, and commitment to daily routine, has been a benefit for me. Thank you for maintaining the study with integrity and professionalism. Being a part of this is something to be proud of.” **Lawrence M.**, of Georgia