

1 **B-vitamins and hip fracture. Secondary analyses and extended follow-up of two large**
2 **randomized controlled trials.**

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4 M Garcia Lopez^{1,2}, MD, K H Bønaa³, MD PhD, M Ebbing^{4,5}, MD PhD, E F Eriksen¹, MD
5 PhD, C G Gjesdal^{6,7}, MD PhD, O Nygård^{6,8}, MD PhD, G S Tell⁵, PhD, P M Ueland^{6,9}, MD
6 PhD, H E Meyer^{2,10}, MD PhD
7
8

9 ¹Department of Clinical Endocrinology, Morbid Obesity and Preventive Medicine, Oslo
10 University Hospital, Oslo, Norway
11

12 ²Department of Community Medicine, Institute of Health and Society, University of Oslo,
13 Norway.
14

15 ³Department of Public Health and General Practice, Norwegian University of Science and
16 Technology, Trondheim, Norway; Clinic for Heart Disease, St. Olav's University Hospital,
17 Trondheim, Norway; Department of Community Medicine, UiT The Arctic University of
18 Norway
19

20 ⁴Domain for Health Data and Digitalization, Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Bergen,
21 Norway
22

23 ⁵Department of Global Public Health and Primary Care, University of Bergen, Bergen,
24 Norway
25

26 ⁶Department of Clinical Science, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway
27

28 ⁷Department of Rheumatology, Haukeland University Hospital, Bergen, Norway
29

30 ⁸Department of Heart Disease, Haukeland University Hospital, Bergen, Norway
31

32 ⁹Laboratory of Clinical Biochemistry, Haukeland University Hospital, Bergen, Norway
33

34 ¹⁰Domain for Mental and Physical Health, Norwegian Institute of Public Health, Oslo,
35 Norway.
36

37 Corresponding author: Maria Garcia Lopez, Institute of Health and Society, University of
38 Oslo, PO Box 1130, N-0318, Oslo. Telephone number: 0047 22850532, e-mail:
39 m.g.lopez@medisin.uio.no.
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41 **Supplemental data:** CONSORT checklist, Supplemental figure.
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1 **ABSTRACT**

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3 Elevated plasma homocysteine levels are associated with increased risk of fractures in
4 observational studies. However, it is unsettled if homocysteine-lowering treatment affects
5 fracture risk. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of an intervention with B-
6 vitamins on the risk of hip fracture in a secondary analysis of combined data from two large
7 randomized controlled trials originally designed to study cardiovascular diseases. Both trials
8 had identical design, intervention and primary objective. Based on a 2x2 factorial design, the
9 intervention consisted of a daily capsule with either 1) folic acid (0.8 mg) plus vitamin B₁₂
10 (0.4 mg) and vitamin B₆ (40 mg) or 2) folic acid (0.8 mg) plus vitamin B₁₂ (0.4 mg) or 3)
11 vitamin B₆ alone (40 mg) or 4) placebo. The participants were followed with respect to hip
12 fracture during the trial or during an extended follow-up (from the trial start for each patient
13 until the end of 2012). No statistically significant association was found between folic acid
14 plus vitamin B₁₂ treatment and the risk of hip fracture, neither during the trial (median 3.3
15 years; hazard ratio (HR) 0.87; 95% CI 0.48-1.59) nor during the extended follow-up (median
16 11,1 years; HR 1.08; 95% CI 0.84-1.40). Nor were there significant differences in the risk of
17 hip fracture between groups receiving vs. not receiving vitamin B₆ during the trial (HR, 1.42;
18 95% CI 0,78-2,61). However, during the extended follow-up those receiving vitamin B₆
19 showed a significant 42% higher risk of hip fracture (HR, 1.42; 95% CI 1.09-1.83) compared
20 to those not receiving vitamin B₆. In conclusion, treatment with folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂
21 was not associated with the risk of hip fracture. Treatment with high dose of vitamin B₆ was
22 associated with a slightly increased risk of hip fracture during the extended follow-up (in-trial
23 plus post-trial follow-up).

24 **Trials registration:** [clinicaltrials.gov](https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/study/NCT00671346). Identifier: NCT00671346

25 **Keywords:** hip fracture, vitamin B₆, folic acid, vitamin B₁₂, randomized controlled trial.

1 **INTRODUCTION**

2 The use of vitamin supplements is common. According to the National Health and Nutrition
3 Examination Survey (2003-2006), half of the US population used at least one dietary
4 supplement, 10% reported taking more than 5 dietary supplements and around 30% took
5 supplements containing vitamin B12 or B6.¹ For many nutrients, both too low and too high
6 intakes may have adverse health consequences. According to randomized controlled trials
7 (RCTs), high-dose vitamin supplementation may lead to unexpected side effects. For
8 example, increased risk of lung cancer has been reported in men supplemented with beta
9 carotene,² supplementation with high doses of vitamin E may increase all-cause mortality³
10 and contrary to expectation, increased risk of fracture in women have been reported in two
11 randomized controlled trials after treatment with annual mega doses of vitamin D.^{4 5} Large
12 homocysteine-lowering B-vitamin trials have failed to demonstrate prevention of
13 cardiovascular diseases^{6 7} and cancer,^{8 9} and possible side effects have been reported.^{10 11}
14
15 Hip fractures constitute a major health problem in the elderly and are strongly associated with
16 increased mortality and a burden for patients, the health care system and society.¹² The
17 expected rise in life expectancy in the global population will most probably lead to a
18 substantial increase in the number of fractures and its consequences.¹³ The study and
19 characterization of modifiable risk factors is essential for osteoporosis and fracture
20 prevention. Several observational studies have showed an association between high levels of
21 circulating total homocysteine (tHcy) and increased risk of osteoporosis and hip fracture.^{14 15}
22 In vitro studies have revealed possible mechanisms on how homocysteine may affect bone
23 health by interfering with collagen cross linkage formation (reducing bone quality) and by
24 stimulating osteoclast activity (leading to bone loss).^{16 17}

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1 Vitamin B₁₂ and folate play important roles in the metabolism of homocysteine, being co-
2 factors for the methionine synthase enzyme. An increase in the concentration of these
3 vitamins leads to a reduction in plasma tHcy levels.¹⁸ Observational studies have reported a
4 small but significant inverse association between folate and vitamin B₁₂ and fracture risk.^{15 19}
5 ²⁰ A possible direct effect of B-vitamins on bone physiology has also been investigated.
6 Vitamin B₆ is an essential co-factor for the enzyme lysyl oxidase, which is important for
7 collagen cross-linking formation, and deficiency of vitamin B₆ may lead to impaired cross-
8 linking formation.²¹ In vitro studies on a possible independent effect of folate and vitamin B₁₂
9 on bone structure are limited and their results are inconsistent.²²
10
11 Based on these premises, one RCT has been performed to evaluate a possible preventive
12 effect of homocysteine-lowering treatment with B-vitamins on fracture incidence,²³ and three
13 have assessed fractures as secondary outcomes.²⁴⁻²⁶ However, results of these studies are
14 inconclusive, and it is unlikely that new, large RCTs will be performed in order to establish
15 the scientific basis for clinical advice on the use of B-vitamin supplements to prevent
16 fractures. Hence, we utilized data from two Norwegian RCTs which were performed to assess
17 the effect of intervention with high-dose oral B-vitamin treatment on cardiovascular disease,²⁷
18 ²⁸ to study whether there were any associations between the intervention with B-vitamins and
19 the risk of hip fracture during the in-trial period and extended follow-up.

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METHODS

Participants and study intervention

We combined data from two randomized, placebo-controlled, double-blind clinical trials performed in Norway: the Norwegian Vitamin Trial (NORVIT) (lasting from December 1998 to March 2004) and the Western Norway B Vitamin Intervention Trial (WENBIT) (lasting from January 2000 to October 2005). Median in-trial follow-up was 3.4 years for NORVIT and 3.2 years for WENBIT. These trials had identical design, intervention, central laboratory and primary objective to determine if an intervention with folic acid, vitamin B₁₂ and vitamin B₆ could reduce cardiovascular morbidity and mortality in patients with ischemic heart disease. The objectives, design, and methods have been reported in more detail elsewhere,^{27 28} and results from combined analyses of both studies have previously been reported concerning risk of cancer, cardiovascular diseases and total mortality.^{29 30} No benefit was found of folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ or vitamin B₆ treatment on cardiovascular outcomes.

In short, the studies had a two-by-two factorial design and patients were randomly assigned to 1 of 4 different groups receiving one capsule per day containing: (1) folic acid (0.8 mg) plus vitamin B₁₂ (cyanocobalamin, 0.4 mg) and vitamin B₆ (pyridoxine hydrochloride, 40 mg) or (2) folic acid (0.8 mg) plus vitamin B₁₂ (0.4 mg) or (3) vitamin B₆ alone (40 mg) or (4) placebo. Blood samples were collected at baseline, at 1-2 months, and at the end of the intervention. They were analysed for serum creatinine, plasma homocysteine, serum cobalamin, serum folate and plasma pyridoxal 5'phospate (PLP) as previously described.²⁹

Among baseline characteristics registered in the NORVIT and WENBIT trials, the following variables were considered of special relevance to the current study: age, gender, body mass index (BMI), smoking status, hypertension, (defined as medically treated) diabetes mellitus

1 (previously diagnose based on glucose levels) and presence of the 5,10-
2 methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase (MTHFR) gene (NCBI Entrez Gene 4524) 677 C-->T
3 polymorphism (in which the TT genotype encodes for an enzyme with less activity, leading to
4 increased tHcy).³¹

6 Hip fracture ascertainment

7 The combined dataset from the NORVIT and WENBIT trials was linked to new hip fractures
8 in the NORHip database using the unique Norwegian 11 digit personal identification number
9 in order to identify incident hip fractures among trial participants during follow-up. NORHip
10 is a database including data on all patients with hip fractures treated at Norwegian hospitals
11 from 1994 to 2013 extracted from the hospitals' patient administrative systems. As described
12 previously³² a new hip fracture in NORHip was identified in patients with a diagnosis code
13 for cervical, trochanteric or sub-trochanteric hip fracture (ICD-9: 820 with all subgroups;
14 ICD-10: S72.0-S72.2) and a surgical procedure code indicating hip fracture surgery (98% of
15 the fractures). A comprehensive algorithm was used to identify new hip fractures in cases
16 with ambiguous information (classified as possible hip fractures) by taking surgical procedure
17 codes, diagnosis codes and time between hospitalizations into account (around 2% of the
18 fractures). The study outcome was defined as the first hip fracture sustained by a trial
19 participant from inclusion throughout follow-up. If a person sustained more than one fracture
20 during follow-up, only the first was included.

22 Follow-up and statistical analyses

23 Analyses were prepared and described on a blinded dataset (the variable giving information
24 on which group each individual was randomized to was not included) and an analysis plan
25 was agreed upon with a statistician not otherwise involved in our study (see supplementary

1 information: Analysis plan). The in-trial follow-up for each participant included the time from
2 inclusion until the end of the intervention. To assess any long-term association, the extended
3 follow-up (in-trial plus post-trial) lasted from the start of the trial until December 31st 2012.
4 For both the in-trial and the extended follow-up, observation time was calculated from the
5 date of inclusion until date of first hip fracture, date of death or end of follow-up. Date of
6 death was obtained by linkage to the National Population Register.

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8 There were 43 hip fractures in the study population during the in-trial follow-up and 236
9 during the extended follow-up. Based on these numbers a post-hoc calculation was
10 performed: given that 50% of the participants were exposed to folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂, the
11 study had an 80% statistical power to find a relative risk of hip fracture of 0.39 at the 5%
12 significance level during the in-trial follow-up, and a relative risk of 0.69 in the extended
13 follow-up.

14

15 Changes in serum or plasma markers from baseline until the end of intervention were tested
16 with the paired sample t-test (only patients with serum or plasma measurements at both
17 occasions were included in these analyses).

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19 Cumulative hazard curves were constructed by Cox proportional hazard regression, and
20 differences between the groups were tested by the score test. Unadjusted hazard ratios (HR)
21 with 95% Confidence Intervals (CI) were estimated by Cox proportional hazards regression
22 stratified by trial. Adjusted HR's were also calculated, adjusting for the following baseline
23 characteristics: age (as a continuous variable), gender, BMI (as a continuous variable),
24 smoking status, hypertension, diabetes mellitus and the MTHFR 677 C→T polymorphism.

25 We entered interaction terms to test if these variables interacted with the treatment modalities

1 on fracture risk. Proportional hazard assumption was tested using Schoenfeld residuals, and
2 no violation of this assumption was detected.

3

4 Subgroup analyses.

5 The following six variables were dichotomized and displayed in forest-plots: *gender*, *age*
6 which was dichotomized based on the median age of participants (62.5 years), *trial*
7 (NORVIT/ WENBIT), *smoking status* (never smokers or ex-smokers >1 month vs. current
8 smokers), *MTHFR 677 C→T polymorphism* (TT vs. CC or CT), *plasma tHcy levels* (based
9 on a previous publication from the NORVIT study,²⁷ high baseline tHcy was defined as
10 >13μmol/l). STATA statistical software, version 14 (Stata Corp. Texas. USA) was used in the
11 analysis.

12

13 Ethics.

14 No further patient contribution was required for the hip fracture follow-up. The study was
15 approved by the Regional Committee for Medical and Health Research Ethics
16 (2014/602/REK vest). ClinicalTrials.gov identifier: NCT00671346.

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1 RESULTS

2 Patients

3 A total of 6837 participants were included in the analysis (see supplemental figure), 3749
4 (54.8%) from NORVIT and 3090 (45.2%) from WENBIT. There were no substantial
5 differences between the intervention groups in baseline characteristics (Table 1). Mean age of
6 participants was 62.3 (± 11.0) years, mean BMI was 26.6 (± 3.8) and 23.5% were women.
7 Thirty-nine per cent of the participants were current smokers, 10.6% had diabetes mellitus
8 and 8.2% presented the MTHFR 677C \rightarrow T polymorphism. Only 22 (1.4%) women and 7
9 (0.1%) men reported intake of osteoporosis medication at baseline. Median in-trial follow-up
10 was 3.3 years (interquartile range 2.6-3.5 years), and 11.1 years (interquartile range 9.1-12.2
11 years) for the extended follow-up.

12

13 Vitamin and homocysteine levels during study treatment

14 As previous published,²⁹ mean concentration of plasma tHcy at baseline was 12.2 $\mu\text{mol/L}$
15 ($\text{SD} \pm 5.1$). The reference range of homocysteine increases with age; for individuals older than
16 59 years it should be lower than 12 $\mu\text{mol/L}$ (5.8-11.9 $\mu\text{mol/L}$). Hyperhomocysteinemia is
17 considered with values of tHcy $> 15 \mu\text{mol/L}$. Deficit in vitamin B₆ (PLP $< 20 \text{ nmol/L}$)³³ was
18 found in 16.4% of the participants. Changes in circulating levels of the B-vitamins from
19 baseline to the end of the intervention are shown in Table 2. Whereas participants receiving
20 folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ had a substantial decrease in plasma tHcy and a substantial
21 increase in serum folate and serum cobalamin, only minor changes in these parameters were
22 found in those not receiving folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂. Plasma PLP levels increased
23 dramatically in both groups receiving intervention with vitamin B₆, whereas minor changes
24 were seen for those not receiving vitamin B₆.

Table 1. Baseline characteristics of the NORVIT/WENBIT population^a

Characteristics	Intervention group			
	Folic acid + Vitamin B ₁₂ and Vitamin B ₆ (n =1708)	Folic acid + Vitamin B ₁₂ (n =1703)	Vitamin B ₆ (n =1705)	Placebo (n =1721)
NORVIT study, No. (%)	937 (54.9)	935 (54.9)	934 (54.8)	943 (54.8)
WENBIT study, No. (%)	771 (45.1)	768 (45.1)	771 (45.2)	778 (45.2)
Age, y^b	62.7 ± 11.2	62.3 ± 10.9	62.0 ± 10.9	62.3 ± 10.7
Gender male, No.(%)	1310 (76.7)	1313 (77.1)	1304 (76.5)	1300 (75.5)
BMI,^{b,c}	26.6 ± 3.9	26.5 ± 3.8	26.5 ± 3.7	26.7 ± 3.8
Smoking status, (%)				
Never smoker	488 (28.6)	514 (30.2)	449 (26.4)	487 (28.4)
Ex-smoker< 1 month ^d	553 (32.4)	565 (33.2)	538 (31.6)	552 (32.2)
Current smoker	665 (39.0)	621 (36.5)	715 (42.0)	676 (39.4)
Hypertension, yes (%)	627 (36.9)	605 (35.9)	615 (36.3)	643 (37.4)
Diabetes mellitus, yes (%)	187 (11.0)	175 (10.3)	163 (9.6)	199 (11.6)
Vitamin supplements^e	401 (23.5)	398 (23.4)	390 (22.9)	392 (22.8)
MTHFR 677 genotype, No./Total No. (%)				
CC	806 (49.5)	862 (53.0)	810 (49.5)	816 (49.7)
CT	677 (41.6)	636 (39.1)	699 (42.7)	692 (42.1)
TT	144(8.9)	129 (7.9)	127 (7.8)	135 (8.2)
Serum or plasma biochemical values				
Creatinine ^b , µmol/L	91.6 ± 23.0	90.8 ± 21.5	90.5 ± 21.4	91.6 ± 21.8
Plasma total homocysteine ^b , µmol/L	12.17 ± 4.82	12.06 ± 4.69	12.30 ± 5.60	12.29 ± 5.06
Serum cobalamin ^b (Vitamin B12), pmol/L	384.31 ± 305.86	387.20 ± 273.00	388.22 ± 467.32	378.67±220.30
Serum folate ^b , nmol/L	12.63 ± 21.04	12.18 ± 23.54	10.85 ± 7.87	10.85 ± 7.23
Plasma pyridoxal 5 [′] phosphate ^b (Vitamin B6), nmol/L	43.2 ± 44.0	38.5 ± 29.3	43.5 ± 44.3	39.3 ± 35.5

Abbreviations: BMI, Body mass index, *MTHFR*, 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase; NORVIT, the Norwegian Vitamin Trial; WENBIT, the Western Norway B Vitamin Intervention Trial.

^aInformation available for 6827 participants with BMI, 6823 with smoking status, 6796 with hypertension status, 6808 with Diabetes mellitus status, 6533 with *MTHFR* 677 genotype (out of a total of 6837 participants).

^bValues are expressed as mean ± standard deviation.

^cBMI was calculated as weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared.

^dDefined as: participant quit smoking more than 1 month before trial entry.

^eDaily or often use of vitamin supplements.

Table 2. Circulating homocysteine and B-vitamins during the trials^a

	Baseline Mean ± SD^b	End of study Mean ± SD^b	Change Mean ± SD^b	P^c
Plasma total homocysteine, µmol/L				
Folic acid + Vitamin B ₁₂ + Vitamin B ₆ n= 1385	11.82 ± 4.27	8.84 ± 3.22	-2.97 ± 3.76	<0.001
Folic acid + Vitamin B ₁₂ n= 1417	11.95 ± 4.72	9.13 ± 3.71	-2.82 ± 4.57	<0.001
Vitamin B ₆ n= 1373	12.05 ± 5.19	12.25 ± 5.04	0.20 ± 4.65	0.127
Placebo n= 1400	11.97 ± 4.60	12.42 ± 5.26	0.46 ± 4.61	<0.001
Serum cobalamin (Vitamin B₁₂), pmol/L				
Folic acid + Vitamin B ₁₂ + Vitamin B ₆ n=1376	380.54 ± 167.48	610.66 ± 324.54	230.12 ± 299.13	<0.001
Folic acid + Vitamin B ₁₂ n= 1405	386.02 ± 268.32	626.76 ± 488.01	240.75 ± 430.86	<0.001
Vitamin B ₆ n= 1364	388.69 ± 509.68	381.56 ± 274.39	-7.13 ± 502.70	0.600
Placebo n= 1385	376.14 ± 216.21	379.21 ± 223.51	3.07 ± 178.43	0.522
Serum folate, nmol/L				
Folic acid + Vitamin B ₁₂ + Vitamin B ₆ n= 1378	12.13 ± 17.88	59.35 ± 31.84	47.22 ± 34.81	<0.001
Folic acid + Vitamin B ₁₂ n= 1411	12.34 ± 25.29	66.21 ± 36.89	53.87 ± 44.11	<0.001
Vitamin B ₆ n=1362	10.94 ± 7.77	11.40 ± 11.10	0.45 ± 11.99	0.162
Placebo n= 1388	10.84 ± 7.10	13.81 ± 14.08	2.97 ± 13.86	<0.001
Plasma pyridoxal 5'phosphate (Vitamin B₆), nmol/L				
Folic acid+ Vitamin B ₁₂ + Vitamin B ₆ n=1366	42.54 ± 39.37	292.35 ± 175.54	249.81 ± 176.17	<0.001
Folic acid + Vitamin B ₁₂ n= 1397	38.66 ± 28.47	47.01 ± 42.36	8.34 ± 45.78	<0.001
Vitamin B ₆ n= 1366	44.13 ± 44.05	289.90 ± 176.67	245.77 ± 177.40	<0.001
Placebo n= 1378	40.07 ± 36.88	48.11 ± 41.63	8.04 ± 49.23	<0.001

^a Patients with data both at the beginning and at the end of the intervention.

^b Values are expressed as mean ± standard deviation.

^c Paired *t* test for difference between values at the start and at the end of the intervention of the four intervention groups.

Table 3. Baseline characteristics of the NORVIT/WENBIT population based on sustaining vs. no sustaining a hip fracture during extended follow-up.^a

Characteristics	Hip fracture (n= 236)	No hip fracture (n=6,603)	P value ^b
Study			<0.01
NORVIT, No. (%)	152 (64.4)	3,597 (54.4)	
WENBIT, No. (%)	84 (35.6)	3,006 (45.5)	
Age, y^c	71.4 ± 8.4	62.0 ± 10.9	<0.01
Gender male, No. (%)	118 (50)	5,111 (77.4)	<0.01
BMI^{c,d}	24.7 ± 3.6	26.2 ± 3.8	<0.01
Smoking status, yes (%)			0.05
Never smoker	93 (39.4)	1,845 (28.0)	
Ex-smoker >1 month ^e	65 (27.5)	2,144 (32.6)	
Current smoker	78 (33.1)	2,592 (39.4)	
Hypertension, yes (%)	107 (45.7)	2,385 (36.3)	<0.01
Diabetes Mellitus, yes (%)	40 (17.2)	684 (10.4)	<0.01
MTHFR 677 C→T polymorphism, No. yes/Total No, (%)	16/224 (7.1)	519/6,311 (8.2)	0.5
Serum or plasma biochemical values			
Creatinine, (No.) μmol/L ^c	(236) 93.2 ± 29.1	(6,603) 91.0 ± 21.6	0.13
Homocysteine, (No.) μmol/L ^c	(235) 13.6 ± 5.2	(6,581) 12.2 ± 5.0	<0.01
Cobalamin, (No.) pmol/L ^c	(234) 431.5 ± 517.6	(6,517) 382.9 ± 320.8	0.02
Folate, (No.) nmol/L ^c	(233) 11.3 ± 8.3	(6,542) 11.6 ± 16.9	0.70
Pyridoxal 5 ⁺ phosphate, (No.) nmol/L ^c	(233) 35.1 ± 30.0	(6,492) 41.4 ± 39.1	0.02

Abbreviations: BMI, Body mass index, *MTHFR*, 5,10-methylenetetrahydrofolate reductase; NORVIT, the Norwegian Vitamin Trial; WENBIT, the Western Norway B Vitamin Intervention Trial.

^aBecause of rounding, percentages may not total 100.

^bFor interaction between variables (differences were tested by using a chi-square test for categorical variables, and *t*-test for continuous variables).

^cValues are expressed as mean ± standard deviation.

^dBMI was calculated as weight in kilograms divided by height in meters squared.

^eDefined as: participant quit smoking more than 1 month before trial entry.

1 Fractures

2 A total of 43 patients (28 women) suffered a hip fracture during the in-trial follow-up, and
3 236 (118 women) during the extended follow-up. For baseline characteristics of those
4 suffering a hip fracture, see Table 3.

5 As shown in Table 4 and figure 1 there were no significant differences in the risk of hip
6 fracture between the intervention groups receiving folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ versus the
7 groups not receiving it, with a HR of 0.87 (95% CI 0.48-1.59) during the in-trial follow-up,
8 and a HR of 1.08 (95% CI 0.84-1.40) during the extended follow-up. No material differences
9 were found in the results after adjusting for baseline characteristics (data not shown).

10

11 On the other hand, there was a statistically significant 42% (95% CI 9%-83%) increased risk
12 of hip fracture in the groups receiving vitamin B₆ compared with groups not receiving vitamin
13 B₆ during the extended follow-up. The corresponding p-value for the score test was 0.008
14 (Figure 2). For the in-trial follow-up, there was a non-significant association with a HR of
15 1.42 (95% CI 0.78-2.61). Adjusting for baseline characteristics did not change the results
16 substantially (data not shown).

17

18 Considering the four treatment groups separately, the incidence rate of hip fracture throughout
19 the extended follow-up was highest in the group receiving both folic acid + vitamin B₁₂ and
20 vitamin B₆, followed by the group receiving vitamin B₆ alone (Table 4). Additional analyses
21 showed that the group receiving treatment with folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ and vitamin B₆ had
22 a statistically significant higher fracture risk compared to the placebo group (HR 1.49; 95% CI
23 1.05-2.11) (results not included in Table 4).

Table 4. Hip fracture rates according to randomization groups and Hazard Ratios (HR) of hip fracture with 95% confidence interval (CI) according to folic acid vs. no folic acid treatment groups and vitamin B₆ versus no vitamin B₆ treatment groups.^a

	Number of Fractures (Rates per 1000 Observation-Years)				Hazard Ratio (95% CI), p value		
	Total Number of Fractures	Folic Acid + Vitamin B ₁₂ and Vitamin B ₆	Folic Acid + Vitamin B ₁₂	Vitamin B ₆	Placebo	Folic Acid+Vitamin B ₁₂ vs. Non-Folic Acid+Vitamin B ₁₂ Groups	Vitamin B ₆ vs. Non-Vitamin B ₆ Groups
In-trial	43	11 (2.1)	9 (1.7)	14 (2.7)	9 (1.7)	0.87 (0.48-1.59) p:0.66	1.42(0.78-2.61) p:0.25
Extended Follow-up	236	75 (4.5)	46 (2.7)	62 (3.6)	53 (3.0)	1.08 (0.84-1.40) p:0.54	1.42 (1.09-1.83) p <0.01

Abbreviations: CI, confidence interval.

^aAll models are stratified by trial (NORVIT or WENBIT).

There were no statistically significant differences between each of the other two groups compared with placebo for the risk of hip fracture, with a HR =0.89, 95% CI (0.60-1.32) for the group receiving folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ and a HR= 1.19, 95% CI (0.83-1.72) for the group receiving vitamin B₆. However, the interaction term between the two treatment regimes and risk of hip fracture was not statistically significant (p= 0.20).

Stratified analyses

Overall, the interaction terms between the treatment modalities and relevant baseline characteristics were not statistically significant, indicating no effect modification (Figure 3 and 4). The only exception was a statistically significant interaction between gender and the folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ treatment (Figure 3; *p* value for interaction = 0.027). Women, but not men, receiving folic acid plus B₁₂ had a statistically significant increased risk of fracture. To explore this further, we analysed the four intervention groups separately. Compared to placebo (reference group), women receiving both B vitamin treatments (folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ and vitamin B₆) had a HR=1.87 (95% CI 1.14-3.07), whereas women receiving folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ had a HR=1.13 (95% CI 0.65-1.95) and women receiving vitamin B₆ alone had a HR=1.03 (95% CI 0.59-1.80) of sustaining a hip fracture. A similar analysis in men showed no significant associations (data not shown).

Sensitivity analyses

Six of the 236 participants who suffered a hip fracture during follow-up had a previous hip fracture before the trials started. Excluding these participants from the analyses did not change the results substantially (data not shown). In addition, five of the included hip fractures were classified as possible hip fractures in NORHip database. Sensitivity analyses excluding these fractures were performed, obtaining similar results (data not shown).

DISCUSSION

This study showed that treatment with folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ in a population with ischemic heart disease during a mean of 3.0 years was not associated with the risk of hip fracture neither during in trial nor during an extended follow-up period (mean 10.0 years). Treatment with vitamin B₆ was associated with an increased risk of hip fracture during the extended follow-up. However no statistical significant association was found for this treatment during the in-trial follow-up.

Strengths and limitations

A main strength of our study was the use of two large and well-designed RCTs with nearly 7,000 participants. We were able to follow the participants with respect to hip fracture by linkage to the national NORHip database covering the complete Norwegian population. These RCTs were performed in Norway, where there is no mandatory folic acid fortification of foods.³⁴ The decrease in tHcy plasma levels due to the folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ intervention in NORVIT/WENBIT trials was thus more pronounced than in trials performed in countries where such fortification is recommended or mandatory. As reported previously, participants showed high adherence to the treatment, assessed by interview, capsule count and corroborated by substantial changes in circulating concentrations of B-vitamins and tHcy during in-trial follow-up.²⁹ We do not know whether patients were taking vitamin supplements during the post-trial follow-up period. However, it is unlikely that they consumed the high doses used in the trials, because patients were discouraged from such supplement use when trial results from NORVIT and WENBIT were available. Further, we assume that post-trial B-vitamin doses were moderate, since the doses of B-vitamins in over-the-counter supplements in Norway are far lower than the doses given in the two trials. Finally, we believe that there were similar proportions of B-vitamin supplement users across initial treatment groups.

It is a limitation that neither NORVIT nor WENBIT were originally designed or powered to study hip fractures. Hence, the registered baseline data did not include bone related variables like bone mineral density, bone markers or data on falls which could have helped assessing possible mechanisms for the increased fracture risk. Nevertheless, a similar distribution of these parameters among the treatment groups is expected due to the randomized allocation of participants to the intervention groups. Information about hip fractures was registry-based, and the individual fracture was not verified by medical record review. However, a previous validation of the NORHip database showed good agreement with medical chart and x-ray verified hip fractures (Cohen`s kappa = 0.95).³⁵ In other words, the possibility of a misclassification of a hip fracture diagnosis is low, and due to the design of the study they would be randomly distributed. We had no information of emigration in the current dataset. Nevertheless, based on a previous publication²⁹ it was less than 0.8% during a median of 6.5 years, so it is quite unlikely that it would have an impact in our results.

It is a limitation that the trials were performed among patients with ischemic heart disease. Thus, the generalizability of our findings must be interpreted with caution. On the other hand, ischemic heart disease and its treatments are common in the elderly. In addition, the study population was rather young with respect to the hip fracture outcome, and only 23% of the participants were women. It would be worth confirming our results in an older population with a higher female ratio and also to study other types of fracture.

The increased risk of hip fracture in those receiving vitamin B₆ was an unexpected finding, and we cannot exclude a spurious association. It is also puzzling that the association was evident years after the intervention had stopped. On the other hand, our analyses were based on two well-designed RCTs where recall bias and confounding were controlled for. We also performed additional analyses adjusting for possible confounders, outcome data was obtained

from a validated database (NORHip), and the research questions (see Analyses plan in additional information) were described before the analyses started.

Comparison with other studies

Regarding treatment with folic acid and vitamin B₁₂, the results of our study are in accordance with previous large RCTs that have failed to identify any significant association between folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ treatment and the incidence of osteoporotic fractures.²⁴⁻²⁶ These RCTs, as the case is for the current study, were not designed to study fractures as the main outcome except for the Dutch B-PROOF (B-vitamin for the Prevention Of Osteoporotic fractures)²³ study. The B-PROOF study showed no effect of homocysteine lowering treatment on fracture incidence. Only in a pre-specified subgroup analysis among those older than 80 years, the intervention group had lower risk of osteoporotic fractures.

Although all of these RCTs presented differences in design and study population, they reached similar overall conclusions of no association between the intervention with folic acid and vitamin B₁₂ and fractures. It could be added that a publication reporting that an intervention with folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ reduced the risk of hip fracture in patients with stroke has recently been retracted by the editors of JAMA.³⁶

To the best of our knowledge, no RCT has been performed to assess the effect of vitamin B₆ alone on hip fracture risk. The HOPE-2²⁶ and VITATOPS²⁵ trials included vitamin B₆ as part of their intervention. However, due to their design based on a combined intervention, assessing the association between vitamin B₆ alone and fracture incidence was not possible. In addition, the number of hip fractures in VITATOPS was limited to 70, and the number of hip fractures in HOPE-2 has not been reported. Observational studies on vitamin B₆ and fracture risk are limited. Although results so far may relate low vitamin B₆ intake to higher risk of hip fracture,^{37 38} the possible role of vitamin B₆ on osteoporotic fractures is unclear.

Possible explanations

We can only speculate on possible mechanistic explanations for the increased fracture risk association with vitamin B₆ treatment. Of potential relevance is the fact that the vitamin B₆ dose of 40 mg/d used in our trials was substantially higher than the Recommended Dietary Allowances (1.3-1.7 mg, depending on adult age) and could be considered as a pharmacologic dose much higher than the average dietary intake (1.5 mg/day in women and 2 mg/day in men).^{39 40} Tolerable upper daily intake has been set to 25 mg by the European Food Safety Authority (year 2000)⁴¹ and to 100 mg by the US Food and Nutrition Board.⁴⁰ Ataxia, neuropathy and decreased muscle tone have been described as side effects of high daily doses of vitamin B₆ (500 mg or more),⁴² although minor neurological symptoms have been described with a dose of 50 mg daily.⁴³ The neurological damage may cause numbness, instability and troubled walking leading to higher possibilities of falling. The neurological effect appears to be dose and time dependent, but there is not adequate evidence concerning a total improvement of functions after discontinuing treatment.⁴⁴

As a second possibility, vitamin B₆ has been suggested as a modulator of steroid receptors, reducing receptors response in the presence of high vitamin B₆ concentrations.^{45 46} However molecular basis of this effect are still unclear. However, in case high doses have such an effect, it is unlikely that participants would regain the bone mass they had lost after the treatment has ended, potentially leading to a long lasting effect.

Common etiological factors have been suggested for cardiovascular diseases and osteoporosis. However, B-vitamin treatment (either with the folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ intervention or vitamin B₆ intervention) had no effect on cardiovascular events in the original analysis of NORVIT and WENBIT, in contrast to the long-term association between vitamin B₆ treatment and hip fracture in the current analysis.

It should be noted that in the additional analysis of the four intervention groups separately, the group receiving both treatments (folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ and vitamin B₆) had the highest risk of hip fracture. These results are somewhat in line with the results from NORVIT, where the participants who received B-vitamin combination therapy had an increased risk of cardiovascular events.²⁷ As for vitamin B₆, the dose of vitamin B₁₂ was also much higher than the Recommended Dietary Allowances (400 mcg versus 2.4 mcg). However, we can not conclude that the association with hip fracture was different for the intervention with folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ and vitamin B₆ compared to the intervention with vitamin B₆ alone, as the interaction term between the two treatments and hip fractures was not statistically significant. On the other hand, the statistical power to detect such a difference was low.

Possible implications

Dietary supplements of vitamins and minerals are extensively available in a wide range of doses and combinations. In segments of the population, high dose vitamin supplementation far exceeding the recommended doses is popular with promise of health benefits and very little focus on potential side effects. Our findings have potential public health implications, mainly related to the need to respect the daily dosage recommendations when there is no deficiency of these vitamins. Use of supplements with high doses of vitamins could result in unexpected deleterious side effects for the individual.

Conclusion

These secondary analyses and extended follow-up of two large randomized controlled trials performed in Norway showed that treatment with folic acid plus vitamin B₁₂ was not associated with the risk of hip fracture. However, treatment with high doses of vitamin B₆ was associated with a slightly increased risk of experiencing a hip fracture during the extended follow-up (3.3 years in-trial plus 7.8 years post-trial follow-up).

Figure legends.

Figure 1. Cumulative hazard curves for hip fracture. Comparisons were performed between folic acid versus no folic acid treatment groups.

Figure 2. Cumulative hazard curves for hip fracture. Comparisons were performed between vitamin B₆ and no vitamin B₆ treatment groups.

Figure 3. Hazard ratios for sustaining a hip fracture in subgroups, and p values for interaction (P). The comparisons were performed for the extended follow-up (from randomization to 31 December 2013) between folic acid and no folic acid treatment groups.

Figure 4. Hazard ratios for sustaining a hip fracture in subgroups, and p values for interaction (P). The comparisons were performed for the extended follow-up (from randomization to 31 December 2013) and between vitamin B₆ and no vitamin B₆ treatment groups.

Contributors: KHB, ME, ON and PMU participated in the planning and completion of the NORVIT and WENBIT trials. GST, CGG and HEM participated in the planning of the NORHip database (NOREPOS collaboration). HEM, ME, ON, KHB, GST and CGG conceived and design the current analyses, whereas HEM and EFE obtained funding. MGL and HEM wrote the analysis plan and performed the statistical analyses. MGL and HEM wrote the first draft of the manuscript and subsequent revisions, and interpreted it in collaboration with CGG, EFE, GST, KHB, ME, ON and PMU. MGL and HM had full access to the final data and had final responsibility for the content of the report and decision to submit for publication. All authors critically revised the paper for important intellectual content and approved the final version. MGL and HEM are the guarantors.

Disclosure

All authors state that they have no conflicts of interest.

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Figure 1. Cumulative hazard curves for hip fracture. Comparisons were performed between folic acid versus no folic acid treatment groups.

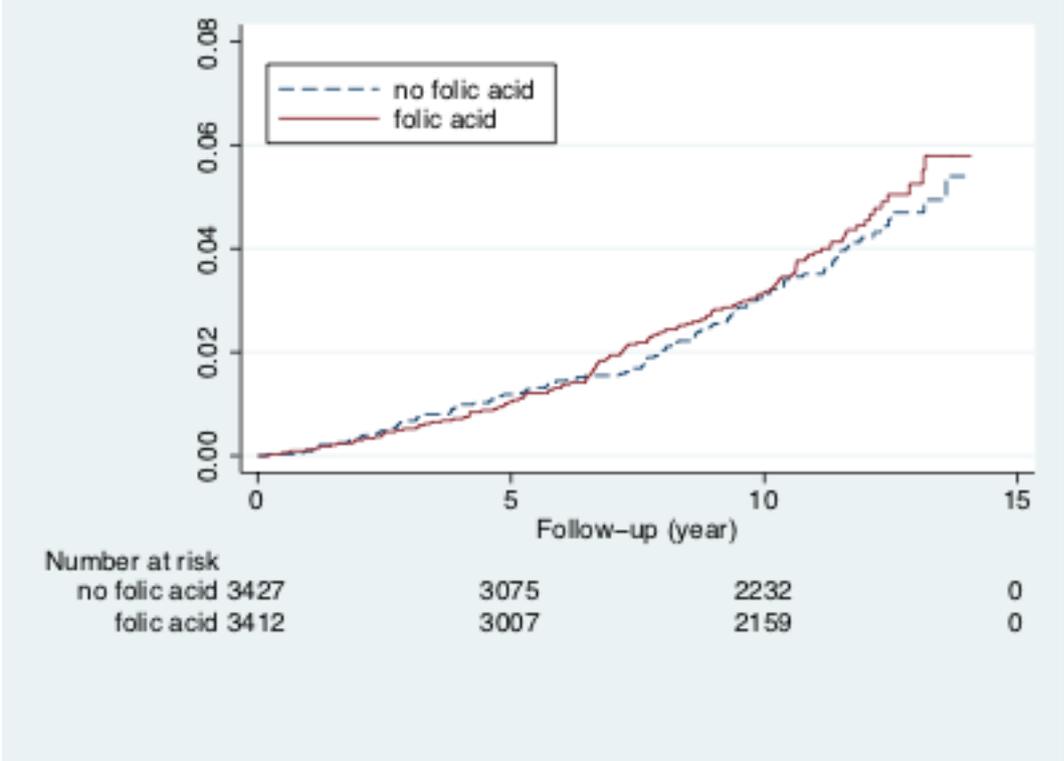


Figure 2. Cumulative hazard curves for hip fracture. Comparisons were performed between vitamin B₆ and no vitamin B₆ treatment groups.

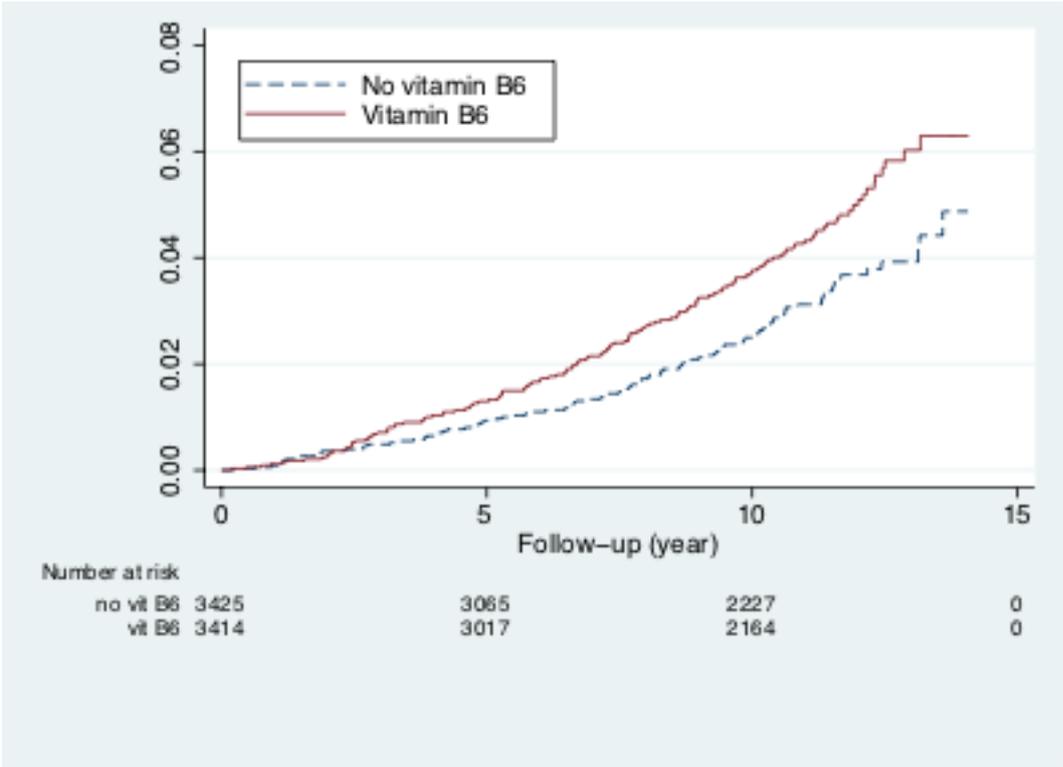


Figure 3. Hazard ratios for sustaining a hip fracture in subgroups, and p values for interaction (P). The comparisons were performed for the extended follow-up (from randomization to 31 December 2013) between folic acid and no folic acid treatment groups.

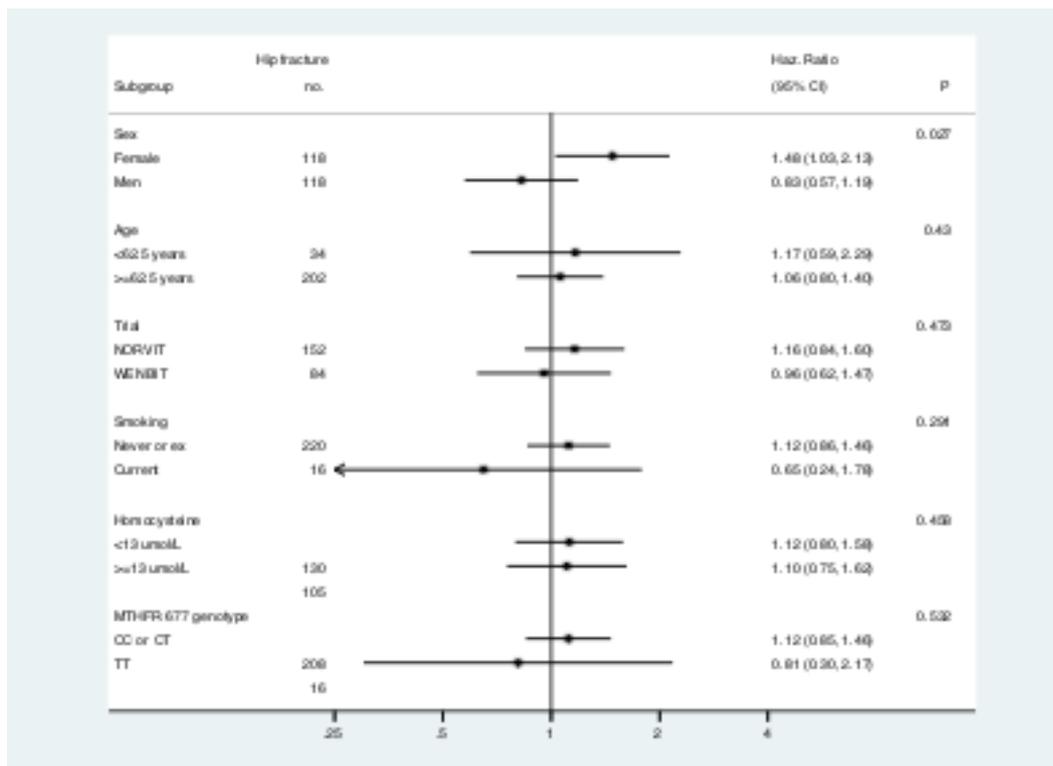


Figure 4. Hazard ratios for sustaining a hip fracture in subgroups, and p values for interaction (P). The comparisons were performed for the extended follow-up (from randomization to 31 December 2013) and between vitamin B₆ and no vitamin B₆ treatment groups.

