

Chronic pain linked to vitamin D deficiency in men

By Marie Ellis | Published Tuesday 29 April 2014

Vitamin D deficiency has been linked to a number of health issues. And now, a new study to be presented at a conference run by the British Society for Rheumatology suggests that low levels of vitamin D in the body are linked to chronic widespread pain.

The researchers note that in the UK, chronic widespread pain is a major public health problem, affecting around 1 in 5 people, and it can be caused by rheumatic and neurological disorders.

Also, around 50% of UK adults have a vitamin D deficiency, a condition that has been linked to osteoporosis and increased preeclampsia risk in pregnant women, among other outcomes.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), vitamin D is found naturally in only a few foods, including fish-liver oils, fatty fishes, mushrooms, egg yolks and liver. In the US, however, vitamin D is commonly added to food products, including milk.

But one of the best ways to get vitamin D in the body is through sunlight, which is transported to the liver and converted to 25-hydroxyvitamin D.

A Recent National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey has shown that these levels have decreased in Americans by about 10% from the periods of 1988-1994 to 2001-2006.

Not only is vitamin D crucial for good bone health, but it may also help with muscle strength and protection against cancer and type 2 diabetes.

Could treating low levels of vitamin D prevent chronic pain?

For this latest study on how inadequate amounts of the vitamin affect the body, researchers from the University of Manchester in the UK used data on over 2,300 men in the European Male Ageing Study.

Results show that those with vitamin D deficiency at the start of the study were more than twice as likely to experience chronic widespread pain, compared with those who had the highest levels.

In detail, after following up with them on an average of 4.3 years, the researchers found that 1 in 15 men who had no symptoms at the start of the study developed chronic widespread pain, and these men were more likely to be obese, physically inactive, depressed and experience other health conditions.



The men who had a vitamin D deficiency at the start of the study were more likely to have chronic widespread pain than those with adequate levels of the vitamin.

"Musculoskeletal pain is a recognized symptom of severe vitamin D deficiency states such as osteomalacia," says lead researcher Paul McCabe. "What is less clear is whether vitamin D deficiency has a role in explaining more common chronic pain symptoms including chronic widespread pain."

The team notes that after taking into account adverse health and lifestyle factors, the link with vitamin D deficiency disappeared.

They say this disappearance could mean that such factors significantly impact the development of chronic widespread pain, suggesting there may be a "complex interplay" between factors causing the illness.

Chris Deighton, president of the British Society for Rheumatology, says:

"This study reveals a number of complex interrelated issues which have extremely important implications for our colleagues in public health in keeping the population as free from widespread musculoskeletal pain as possible."

McCabe notes that, though their study uncovers the relationship between vitamin D and the development of chronic widespread pain, further research is needed to ascertain whether treating low levels of the vitamin could prevent the condition from developing.

Quite a bit of research has come to light lately regarding vitamin D supplementation. *Medical News Today* recently ran a feature on whether vitamin D supplements are actually good for our health.

And a study recently published in the *BMJ* suggested there is no clear evidence of vitamin D supplements conferring health benefits.

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References

Low vitamin D and the risk of developing chronic widespread pain: results from the European Male Ageing Study, Paul McCabe et al., Rheumatology 2014.

Additional source: The British Society for Rheumatology news release, accessed 16 April 2014.

Additional source: CDC Second Nutrition Report, accessed 16 April 2014.

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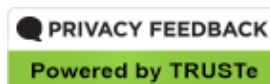
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