

Is Vitamin D The 'Miracle' Nutrient for Multiple Sclerosis Sufferers?

By: David Gutierrez, *Natural News*

Scientists are now beginning to confirm what they have long suspected: boosting vitamin D levels may slow the progression of multiple sclerosis (MS) and prevent brain degeneration.

The most recent evidence came from a study conducted by researchers from the Harvard School of Public Health and published in the journal *JAMA Neurology* in January. The findings suggest that it is important to correct any preexisting vitamin D deficiency as quickly as possible following an MS diagnosis.

"Individuals who present with symptoms suggesting MS should be screened for possible vitamin D deficiency, and this should be corrected by vitamin D supplementation," lead researcher Alberto Ascherio said.

Vitamin D and your immune system

MS is an incurable autoimmune disorder that leads to progressive degeneration of the central nervous system. It produces symptoms such as loss of motor control or even difficulty walking, writing or speaking. Researchers have long suspected a connection between MS and vitamin D, especially as it has become clear what an important role vitamin D plays in maintaining immune health.

Vitamin D, often called the "sunshine vitamin," is produced naturally by the skin upon exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays. Just 15 minutes daily of sun on the unprotected skin of the face and hands can produce enough for light-skinned people, although darker skinned people require more exposure.

In latitudes far from the equator, however, it may not be possible to get enough vitamin D in the winter, especially if your body did not build up reserves from getting plenty of sunlight in the summer. Some of the first connections between vitamin D and MS (and other autoimmune disorders) were made when researchers realized that such diseases were more prevalent at latitudes farther from the equator, where vitamin D deficiency is more widespread.

Less brain damage

In the recent study, researchers tested vitamin D levels in 465 patients recently diagnosed with MS, then followed them for five years. They found that patients whose vitamin D levels increased at least 50 nmol/L in the first year of the study were 57 percent less likely to develop new brain lesions than patients whose vitamin D levels had not increased that much. By the end of the study, the patients with the vitamin D increase were also 57 percent less likely to relapse, had a 25 percent lower annual increase in T2 lesion size, and a 0.41 percent lower annual loss of brain volume.

These findings take the connection between vitamin D and MS to a new level. Prior studies had strongly demonstrated that lower levels of vitamin D lead to a higher risk of developing MS, while long-term studies have shown a connection between lower vitamin D levels and more severe symptoms. This recent study however, provides some of the first evidence that boosting vitamin D levels can actually improve disease outcomes.

"These findings, combined with previous evidence that vitamin D deficiency is a risk factor for MS, and [research on] the immunological effects of vitamin D strongly suggest that maintaining an adequate vitamin D status is important in the treatment of MS," Ascherio said.

A large clinical trial by other researchers is currently underway to determine if vitamin D supplementation can improve symptoms in MS patients.

"It is my belief that these trials will help answer the important question of whether it is safe and effective to recommend high-dose vitamin D supplementation to people with MS," said Ellen Mowry of Johns Hopkins University, a researcher in that study.

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