



The Fat Panel

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Article – 17 May 2007 Clinical hope in vitamin treatment for TB

Research published this week suggests that vitamin D can help keep tuberculosis (TB) at bay. It is thought that vitamin D can help boost the immune system to fight off this potentially deadly condition. Nearly nine million people around the world are newly diagnosed with TB each year and it is estimated that nearly two million people around die each year. Incidence in the UK is on the increase and about 8,000 new cases are expected to be reported here this year.

In the study, which took place at Queen Mary's School of Medicine and Imperial College, 131 people had blood samples taken, which were then infected with the bacterium that causes TB. The group was then split in two and half were given a 2.5mg of vitamin D whilst the other half were given a dummy pill. After six weeks, blood was taken again and infected with the TB bug. When analysed a day later, the growth of bacteria in the blood from the people who were given the vitamin D was 20% less than the other group, suggesting that the vitamin D had helped to keep the disease at bay. Many years ago, vitamin D was used to treat TB in sanatoriums before antibiotics came into use. Now, this new study provides new evidence of the vitamin's preventative benefits.

One in seven adults has been reported to be deficient in vitamin D. People with dark skin, vegans and those who get little exposure to sunlight are most at risk of vitamin D deficiency. Even those who do receive enough vitamin D, either through their diet or the sunlight, may still be deficient if they do not eat enough dietary fat. Vitamins A, D, E and K all need dietary fat in order to be properly absorbed into and used by the body.

There are two main sources of vitamin D – direct from sunlight through the skin or through diet. Vitamin D is found in few foods, but oily fish, spreads and eggs are good sources. In addition to this new link to battling TB, Vitamin D also helps to maintain strong bones and aids the absorption of calcium into the body. A 40-year review of research also found that that a daily dose of vitamin D could cut the risk of cancers of the breast, colon and ovary by up to half. Evidence suggest the sunshine vitamin may also play a vital role in heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure and schizophrenia.