

Bilirubin protects against heart disease

June 26 2012, By Louise Durack

(Medical Xpress) -- There's new hope for the fight against cancer and cardiovascular disease, following breakthrough research identifying a pigment in our bile.

A fluid produced by the liver and stored in the [gallbladder](#), bile's function was simply thought to aid in the digestion process.

However, in conjunction with the University of Vienna and the Heart Research Institute in Sydney, Dr. Andrew Bulmer from the Griffith Health Institute has found that a [pigment](#) in bile called bilirubin could help to stave off cancer and [cardiovascular disease](#).

Published in the leading journal *Free Radical Biology and Medicine*, the scientific report details how Dr. Bulmer and his team conducted a study with 44 participants, half of whom had Gilbert Syndrome.

People with this syndrome show naturally elevated levels of bilirubin in the blood and also higher concentrations of antioxidants, which can protect against disease.

"Analysis of blood revealed that those [study participants](#) with Gilbert Syndrome had less free radical damage and consistently showed higher levels of antioxidants in their blood," said Dr. Bulmer.

"Naturally elevated bilirubin concentrations are clearly protecting persons with Gilbert Syndrome from processes implicated in disease initiation and progression. We are in a unique position to use this

information to assist in preventing an array of diseases in Australia and beyond.

"These findings reveal future potential for new drug, dietary and [lifestyle interventions](#) which could be used to mildly increase the concentration of bilirubin in people at risk of cancer and cardiovascular disease."

By chance, Dr. Bulmer also discovered that bilirubin potentially reduces [cholesterol levels](#) and that this could have an additional impact on preventing cardiovascular disease.

"We will be investigating this additional benefit as part of our ongoing research," he said.

Provided by Griffith University

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