

Sunshine vitamin ups bowel cancer survival odds, study finds

July 9 2014

Bowel cancer patients with high levels of vitamin D in their blood are more likely to survive the disease, a study shows.

Patients with the highest levels of [vitamin D](#) have half the risk of dying compared with those with the lowest levels, the findings reveal.

The study is the first to correlate total [blood levels](#) of vitamin D in bowel cancer patients after their diagnosis – which includes that produced after exposure to sunlight and that obtained from dietary sources – with their long term survival prospects.

The University of Edinburgh team tested blood samples from almost 1600 patients after surgery for bowel cancer.

The greatest benefit of vitamin D was seen in patients with stage 2 disease, at which the tumour may be quite large but the cancer has not yet spread.

Researchers found that three quarters of the patients with the highest vitamin D levels were still alive at the end of five years, compared with less than two thirds of those with the lowest levels.

The results show that vitamin D is associated with a much better chance of [cancer survival](#), although the nature of this relationship is not clear from this study.

The study's authors aim to set up a clinical trial to test whether taking vitamin D tablets in combination with chemotherapy can improve bowel cancer survival rates.

Measuring vitamin D levels in bowel [cancer patients](#) could also provide a useful indication of prognosis, the scientists say.

Professor Malcolm Dunlop, of the Medical Research Council Human Genetics Unit at the University of Edinburgh, said: "Our findings are promising but it is important to note that this is an observational study. We need carefully designed randomised clinical trials before we can confirm whether taking vitamin D supplements offers any survival benefit for [bowel cancer](#) patients."

More information: L. Zgaga et al. Plasma Vitamin D Concentration Influences Survival Outcome After a Diagnosis of Colorectal Cancer. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 7 July 2014.
jco.ascopubs.org/content/early ... 013.54.5947.abstract

Provided by University of Edinburgh

Citation: Sunshine vitamin ups bowel cancer survival odds, study finds (2014, July 9) retrieved 25 April 2024 from
<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-07-sunshine-vitamin-ups-bowel-cancer.html>

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