

# Large proportion of IBS patients are vitamin D deficient

December 21 2015, by Amy Pullan

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Vitamin D supplements

A large proportion of people living with Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) are vitamin D deficient, a new study has found.

Researchers from the University of Sheffield discovered a significant association between a patient's vitamin D levels and the severity of their IBS symptoms, particularly the extent to which IBS affects their quality of life.

The study, which is the first of its kind, found that out of 51 IBS patients tested 82 per cent exhibited insufficient vitamin D levels.

Lead scientist, Dr Bernard Corfe, from the University's Molecular Gastroenterology Research Group, said: "IBS is a poorly understood condition which impacts severely on the quality of life of sufferers. There is no single known cause and likewise no single known cure.

"Clinicians and patients currently have to work together and use trial and error to manage the condition and this may take years with no guarantee of success.

"Our work has shown that most IBS sufferers in our trial had insufficient levels of vitamin D. Furthermore there was an association between vitamin D status and the sufferer's perceived quality of life, measured by the extent to which they reported impact on IBS on life."

IBS is a chronic and debilitating functional disorder of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract which affects around 10-15 per cent of the western population. Little is known about why and how the condition develops, although it is known that diet and stress can make symptoms worse.

The symptoms often cause embarrassment for patients meaning many live with the condition undiagnosed.

IBS accounts for 10 per cent of visits to GP surgeries and the condition has a significant and escalating burden on society as a consequence of lost work days and time spent on regular hospital appointments.

Dr Corfe added: "Our data provide a potential new insight into the condition and importantly a new way to try to manage it.

"It was clear from our findings that many people with IBS should have their vitamin D levels tested, and the data suggests that they may benefit from supplementation with vitamin D.

"As a result of this exploratory study, we're now able to design and justify a larger and more definitive clinical trial."

Researcher Vicky Grant has suffered with IBS for over 30 years. She reported a significant improvement in her symptoms following an introduction to a high-dose of vitamin D3 supplement approximately five years ago.

"I read about other IBS patients experiencing success with vitamin D, via the online patient community," said Vicky.

"I wasn't really expecting the vitamin D supplements to work as I had tried and failed with so many other treatments. I'm not cured but I have found that supplementation has dramatically improved my IBS."

IBS affects each patient differently and can be triggered by different things in each individual making the disease very difficult to treat. Patients can experience diarrhoea or constipation as a result of their symptoms or their bowel habits can alternate.

Vicky, who also leads a storying project called "Knowing as Healing: living well with [irritable bowel syndrome](#)", added: "IBS is quite a complex illness and it is common for sufferers to also have other disorders or diseases alongside the condition. The vitamin D supplements have had a beneficial effect here too."

The role of vitamin D supplementation in other GI conditions is also supported by other studies which show associations between a vitamin D deficiency and inflammatory bowel disease.

Vitamin D has recently been linked to lowering blood pressure and reducing the risks of heart and kidney disease.

Results of the study, which is published today (Monday 21 December 2015) in the journal *British Medical Journal Open Gastroenterology*, suggest that IBS [patients](#) would benefit from [vitamin D](#) screening and possible supplementation.

**More information:** Simon Tazzyman et al. Vitamin D associates with improved quality of life in participants with irritable bowel syndrome: outcomes from a pilot trial, *BMJ Open Gastroenterology* (2015). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjgast-2015-000052](#)

Provided by University of Sheffield

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