

Immune study sheds light on vitamin D effects

April 15 2019



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Scientists have uncovered fresh insights into how vitamin D affects the immune system and might influence susceptibility to diseases such as multiple sclerosis.

Vitamin D is produced by the body in response to sunlight and is often lauded for its health benefits. Researchers found it also affects key cells

of the immune system.

This discovery might explain how vitamin D regulates immune reactions that have been implicated in autoimmune diseases such as MS.

Key mechanism

The University of Edinburgh team focused on how vitamin D affects a mechanism in the body's immune system – dendritic cells' ability to activate T cells.

In [healthy people](#), T cells play a crucial role in helping to fight infections. In people with autoimmune diseases, however, they can start to attack the body's own tissues.

Cell study

By studying cells from mice and people, the researchers found vitamin D caused [dendritic cells](#) to produce more of a molecule called CD31 on their surface and that this hindered the activation of T cells.

The team observed how CD31 prevented the two cell types from making a stable contact – an essential part of the activation process – and the resulting immune reaction was far reduced.

Disease susceptibility

Researchers say the findings shed light on how vitamin D deficiency may regulate the immune system and influence susceptibility to autoimmune diseases.

"Low vitamin D status has long been implicated as a significant risk

factor for the development of several autoimmune diseases. Our study reveals one way in which vitamin D metabolites can dramatically influence the [immune system](#)," says Professor Richard Mellanby.

More information: Louise Saul et al. 1,25-Dihydroxyvitamin D3 Restrains CD4+ T Cell Priming Ability of CD11c+ Dendritic Cells by Upregulating Expression of CD31, *Frontiers in Immunology* (2019). DOI: [10.3389/fimmu.2019.00600](https://doi.org/10.3389/fimmu.2019.00600)

Provided by University of Edinburgh

Citation: Immune study sheds light on vitamin D effects (2019, April 15) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-04-immune-vitamin-d-effects.html>

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