Medical Xpress

Internet generation at risk of rickets: study

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Bone-bending rickets can now be added to the list of ills linked to children spending uncounted hours before a computer screen, British researchers said Friday.

Youngsters with rickets, caused primarily by a chronic lack of vitamin D, develop painful and deformed bow-legs that do not grow properly.

The condition is linked mainly with extreme poverty and the 19th-century Victorian England of Charles Dickens, and can be easily avoided through a balanced diet and exposure to sunlight.

But doctors reported this month that cases of the debilitating disease have once again become "disconcertingly common" in Britain.

"Kids tend to stay indoors more these days and play on their computers instead of enjoying the fresh air," said Simon Pearce, a professor at Newcastle University in northeast England and lead author of a new study on Vitamin D deficiency.

"This means their vitamin D levels are worse than in previous years," he said in a press release.

Half of all adults in Britain -- especially in the north -- have Vitamin D deficiency in winter and spring, with one-in-six having severe deficiency.

The condition has been linked to cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes,

several kinds of cancer and a soft-bone condition in adults called osteomalacia.

While the study focused on Britain, the same trend is likely elsewhere in the industrialised world, the researchers suggested.

The solution? Soaking up sunrays helps boost Vitamin D levels, but can also increase the risk of skin cancer.

The other option is adjusting diet. The rickets-preventing vitamin is present in oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, sardines and herring.

"Fifty years ago, many children would have been given regular doses of cod liver oil, but this practice has all but died out," noted co-author Tim Cheetham, also a professor at Newcastle.

But if foul-tasting oils and expensive fish are not options, there is another ready mode of tranmission: milk.

The study, published in the current issue of the British Medical Journal, called for new regulations recommending the addition of vitamin D to milk and similar food products, as has been done in several other countries.

Excessive time spent in front of a computer has also been linked to increased obesity, a jump in attention deficit disorder, and anti-social behaviour.

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