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Can Vitamin D Improve Brain Function?

New Studies Show Low Vitamin D Levels May Impair Cognitive Function

Recently, hundreds of research studies have been published on the role of Vitamin D for maintaining health and prevention of cancer, autoimmune diseases and depression.

Two new European studies looking at vitamin D and cognitive function have taken us one step further to understanding the role of Vitamin D. The first study, led by neuroscientist David Llewellyn of the University of Cambridge, assessed vitamin D levels in more than 1,700 men and women from England, aged 65 or older. Subjects were divided into four groups based on vitamin D blood levels: severely deficient, deficient, insufficient (borderline) and optimum, then tested for cognitive function.

The scientists found that the lower the subjects' vitamin D levels, the more negatively impacted was their performance on a battery of mental tests. Compared with people with optimum vitamin D levels, those in the lowest quartile were more than twice as likely to be cognitively impaired.

A second study, led by scientists at the University of Manchester in England and published online this past May, looked at vitamin D levels and cognitive performance in more than 3,100 men aged 40 to 79 in eight different countries across Europe. The data show that those people with lower vitamin D levels exhibited slower information-processing speed. This correlation was particularly strong among men older than 60 years.

Because cognitive impairment is often a precursor for dementia and Alzheimer's

disease, vitamin D is a hot topic among Alzheimer's scientists, who are racing to answer these questions. Przybelski, for example, is planning a study of vitamin D supplements in healthy, normal elderly adults living in an assisted-living community to see if it will affect their incidence of Alzheimer's in the long term.

So how much is enough vitamin D? Experts say 1,000 to 2,000 IU daily—about the amount your body will synthesize from 15 to 30 minutes of sun exposure two to three times a week—is the ideal range for almost all healthy adults. Keep in mind, however, that skin color, where you live and how much skin you have exposed all affect how much vitamin D you can produce.

