Vitamin D Eases Fibromyalgia Pain: Study

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People suffering from the chronic pain of fibromyalgia might benefit from taking vitamin D supplements if they suffer from low levels of the vitamin, a new study from Austria suggests.

There's no cure for fibromyalgia, which can lead to pain, fatigue and several other symptoms, the researchers said. The exact cause of the illness remains unclear.

In the study, researchers led by Dr. Florian Wepner, of Orthopedic Hospital Vienna Speising, sought to discover whether there is a link between a patient's vitamin D levels and the chronic pain of fibromyalgia. Vitamin D often is called the "sunshine vitamin" because it is manufactured by the body through sunlight's activity on the skin.

Wepner's team launched a randomized, controlled trial in 30 women with fibromyalgia who also had low levels of vitamin D. Some of the women took supplements for 25 weeks and then were tracked for another 24 weeks.

Reporting in the February issue of the journal *Pain*, the researchers said those who took supplements reported less pain and morning fatigue over time than those who did not receive the supplements.

"[Vitamin D] may be regarded as a relatively safe and economical treatment and an extremely cost-effective alternative or adjunct to expensive pharmacological treatment," Wepner said in a journal news release.

Vitamin D levels should be monitored in fibromyalgia patients -- especially in the winter when levels can be lower due to less sun exposure -- and adjusted as necessary, Wepner said.

Although the study was able to find an association between vitamin D supplementation and an easing of fibromyalgia pain, it did not prove a cause-and-effect link.

However, two experts on the illness said the findings make sense.

"Fibromyalgia patients and those with chronic pain should certainly have their vitamin D blood levels checked and, if low, consider supplementation under the guidance of a physician," said Dr. Kiran Patel, a pain medicine specialist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City who often treats people with fibromyalgia.

Dr. Houman Danesh, director of integrative pain management at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York City, agreed. "Vitamin D deficiency has been linked to chronic pain, and this study further strengthens the argument to [replenish] vitamin D in deficient individuals," he said.

"It is important to note that these patients were under the care of a physician during the [vitamin] repletion, and that it took months for the benefits to be shown," Danesh said. "This is expected, as vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin and is stored in fat cells. When a patient has low levels, those stores need to be [replenished], and this takes weeks or months to occur."

Danesh cautioned, however, that people who worry that they are vitamin D-deficient should always check with their doctor before taking supplements. Taking in too much vitamin D can actually be toxic and cause harm, he said.

"Patients should consult their doctor if they think they are deficient or have their levels checked at their next physical," he said.

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