Higher Vitamin D Levels Associated with Improved Lymphoma Survival

A presentation at the 2009 meeting of the American Society of Hematology revealed the finding of researchers from the Mayo Clinic of an association between higher levels of vitamin D and greater survival in individuals being treated for lymphoma.*

Serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D levels were measured in 374 patients with newly diagnosed diffuse large B-cell lymphoma. Half of the patients were found to have deficient levels of less than 25 nanograms per milliliter. This group had a 1.5 times greater adjusted risk of disease progression and twice the rate of dying over the course of the study compared to those with optimal levels.

“While these findings are very provocative, they are preliminary and need to be validated in other studies,” lead investigator Matthew Drake, MD, PhD noted. “However, they raise the issue of whether vitamin D supplementation might aid in treatment for this malignancy, and thus should stimulate much more research.”

—Jon Finkel

Reference

* From a presentation at the 2009 American Society of Hematology meeting.

Less Advanced and Lethal Prostate Cancers in Coffee Drinkers

A recent Frontiers in Cancer Prevention Research Conference was the site of a presentation of the finding that men with a high intake of coffee have a lower risk of advanced and lethal prostate cancer.*

Kathryn M. Wilson, PhD of Harvard School of Public Health and her colleagues evaluated data from nearly 50,000 participants in the Health Professionals’ Follow-Up Study. Coffee intake was assessed for 1986 and every four years thereafter until 2006.

While coffee drinking appeared to have a small protective effect on the overall risk of prostate cancer, when advanced and fatal cancers were analyzed, the risk of each was 59% lower in men who consumed the most coffee.

“Very few lifestyle factors have been consistently associated with prostate cancer risk, especially with risk of aggressive disease, so it would be very exciting if this association is confirmed in other studies,” Dr. Wilson remarked.

Editor’s note: A reduction in the risk of prostate cancer has also been associated with other foods, such as tomato products containing lycopene, green tea, and especially cruciferous vegetables like broccoli and cauliflower.

—Dayna Dye

Reference

* Study from the Frontiers in Cancer Prevention Research Conference, Dec. 6-9, 2009.

Curcumin and Bioperine Target Breast Cancer Stem Cells
An article published online in the journal Breast Cancer Research and Treatment reveals that curcumin and piperine from black pepper help inhibit the growth of stem cells that fuel breast cancer.*

Researchers at the University of Michigan compared the effects of varying concentrations of curcumin and piperine administered to cultured breast cells to a control substance. They found a reduction in markers for stem cells in cultures treated with the lowest concentration of curcumin, and complete inhibition at twice that concentration. Piperine also demonstrated an inhibitory property, although the effects were not as pronounced as those elicited by curcumin. The addition of piperine to curcumin resulted in a reduction in stem cells that was greater than either agent alone, while having no effect on normal cell development.

The report is the first to conclude that curcumin and bioperine could help prevent cancer by targeting stem cells.

Editor’s note: Bioperine is sometimes added to curcumin supplements to increase the absorption of curcumin.

—Dayna Dye

Reference


Milk Thistle Shows Protective Effect Against Chemo-induced Liver Inflammation

A study described in an article published online in the journal Cancer reveals that the herb milk thistle, which contains the liver protective compound silibinin, reduces inflammation of the liver in children receiving treatment for acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL).

In a double-blind trial, Kara Kelly, MD, of the New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center and her colleagues randomized 50 children with inflammation of the liver due to chemotherapy for ALL to receive a placebo or an extract containing one part silibinin to two parts phosphatidylcholine for 28 days. One month after treatment, the liver enzyme AST was significantly lower in children who received milk thistle and a trend toward lower ALT enzyme levels than those measured at baseline was observed compared to the placebo group.

“Our results are promising as there are no substitute medications for treating liver toxicity," Dr. Kelly stated.

Editor’s note: Milk thistle has been available as over-the-counter supplements (silymarin and silibinin) for many years, and is also used to help protect the liver in other conditions.

—Dayna Dye

Reference


Curcumin Shows Chemopreventive Potential for Prostate Cancer