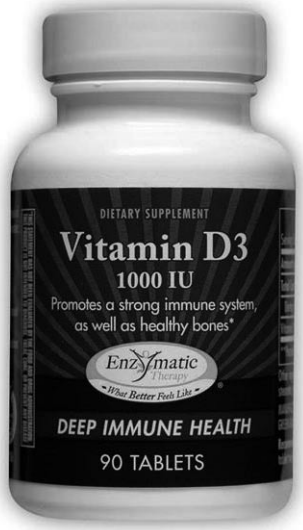
Vitamin D3... is this the missing pain killer in fibromyalgia



Vitamin D appears to be making the news on a regular basis recently with more and more research supporting the use of vitamin D3 supplements especially over the dark winter months. Once considered primarily involved with bone health vitamin D has now been associated with a wide variety of health issues ranging from promoting emotional wellbeing through to maintaining a balanced immune function. Its role as a bone nutrient is still very important as a recent news story highlighted the potential need for vitamin D supplements in women planning to become pregnant. The advice was aimed at women living in Scotland to help combat their known vitamin D deficient state that results from low light exposure. Its now widely thought that a low maternal vitamin D level has significant adverse effects of the healthy growth and development of the foetus.

However, vitamin D has also been implicated in cases of chronic and wide spread musculoskeletal pain and is thought to be associated with the process that links low vitamin D levels with a lack of circulating calcium. The effect of low calcium is to stimulate increased parathyroid hormone secretion. This results in a negative effect on bone health and metabolism. Even mild reductions in circulating calcium results in an elevation of parathyroid hormone that can take its impact on bone density and possibly influence bone architecture. Interestingly, the effect relating most closely to widespread musculoskeletal pains similar to fibromyalgia is bone condition known as osteomalacia. This results from an increase in parathyroid hormone leading to a softening of bone surface causing pain to be generated in very pain sensitive covering of the bone known as the periostium. Osteomalacia has been suggested as an explanation of why many patients with low levels of vitamin D may complain of dull, persistent, generalized musculoskeletal aches and pains. Muscle pain and dysfunction (myopathy) also is part of the problem along with fatigue and decreased muscle strength commonly in the lower limbs. Sadly, early or milder forms of osteomalacia commonly go undiagnosed because the changes are rather subtle. Such 'sub-clinical' cases fall through the medical net because the problem is not bad enough to be detected on conventional bone scans or blood tests. In such situations a trail course of vitamin D3 is worth consideration definitely over the winter months.

As work continues, more pain regulating regions are being identified throughout the body. Studies have now determined that vitamin D receptors can be found within certain brain areas and within the spinal cord helping to explain why vitamin D supplements have been reported as helping neurological pain and some emotional disorders like anxiety and seasonal depression (SAD).

Finally, the inevitable question arises... how much vitamin D3 should we be taking? Vitamin D is a very safe nutrient. According to the UK Food Standards agency, a dose of 0.025mg (1000iu) vitamin D3 would not be expected to cause adverse effects in the general population. American Guidelines suggesting that a daily intake of 2000iu is perfectly safe for use in adults. Toxic reactions are very rare and only associated with massive dose intakes. In summary, I tend to recommend pain sufferers take 2000iu during the winter and reduce to 1000iu in the summer. If you suffer chronic widespread musculoskeletal pain its well worth a try.

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