Low vitamin D levels linked to premature death

Published June 13, 2014 FoxNews.com

The debate over vitamin D continues, and the latest research has found a link between low levels of the fat-soluble vitamin and premature death, Medical News Today reported.

In a new study published in the American Journal of Public Health, researchers from the University of California-San Diego conducted a review of 32 studies that analyzed participants' blood levels of vitamin D and mortality rates. The studies included 566,583 participants from 14 countries, who had an average age of 55.

Researchers found that participants with lower levels of 25-hydroxyvitamin D— the main form of vitamin D found in human blood— were twice as likely to have a premature death, compared to those with higher blood levels of 25-hydroxyvitamin D.

Furthermore, researchers found that approximately half of the participants who were at risk for early death had a vitamin D blood level of 30 ng/ml. An estimated two-thirds of the U.S. population has a blood vitamin D level below 30 ng/ml.

The National Institutes of Health recommends children and adults ages 1 to 70 should consume 600 IU of vitamin D per day. But researchers believe this amount should be increased.

"This study should give the medical community and public substantial reassurance that vitamin D is safe when used in appropriate doses up to 4,000 International Units (IU) per day," said Heather Hofflich, a professor in the UC San Diego School of Medicine's Department of Medicine.

Hofflich advised patients to have their 25-hydroxyvitamin D blood levels checked annually and to consult their doctor before changing their vitamin D intake.

Vitamin D helps the body regulate absorption of calcium and phosphorus in the bones, aids cell communication and strengthens the immune system. Vitamin D deficiency has long been associated with poor bone health, but in the past few years research has linked deficiencies in the vitamin to brain damage and increased preeclampsia risk for pregnant women. Other studies have suggested a lack of clear evidence for vitamin D's health benefits.