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Vitamin D (and mushrooms) a critical tool in cancer prevention

A US clinical trial has found that Vitamin D is a critical tool in fighting cancer, adding further weight to calls to reassess dietary recommendations to prevent serious disease.

A four year study involving 1,179 healthy postmenopausal women found dietary supplementation of Vitamin D and calcium reduced cancer risk by 60 per cent.

The research was conducted by the Creighton University School of Medicine and published in the June 2007 edition of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition.

Accredited Practising Dietitian, Glenn Cardwell said the findings were very exciting and had significant implications for the Australian diet.

Mr Cardwell said recent Australian studies had shown significant numbers of adults and children with Vitamin D deficiency, prompting calls for increased dietary intake and food supplementation. Commonly, half of the population were low in vitamin D, especially during winter. The incidence was as high as 80% in the elderly.

He said adequate Vitamin D had been linked to a number of benefits beyond healthy bones and the prevention of rickets and osteoporosis with studies suggesting it can also lower the risk of multiple sclerosis, gum disease, tooth loss, bowel cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis and diabetes.

“While it is easy to believe Australians receive adequate Vitamin D from exposure to the UV rays in sunlight, studies show this is simply not the case. The issue of deficiency is further heightened by the fact that in Australia very few foods contain Vitamin D.”

“Although major sources of vitamin D in the diet are margarine, canned fish and eggs, mushrooms are likely to become the only non-animal food source of the sunshine vitamin.”

He said the mushroom industry was examining a natural solution to the issue.



“While mushrooms currently have low levels of Vitamin D under normal growing conditions, preliminary US research found that exposing growing mushrooms to just five minutes of UV light substantially increases Vitamin D levels to more than daily needs.”

Mr Cardwell said the Australian mushroom industry was now conducting research through the University of Western Sydney to confirm the mushroom and Vitamin D phenomena.

“Rather than fortifying products, this research could pave the way for mushrooms to provide a naturally good source of Vitamin D to consumers alleviating the need to consider vitamin supplements as part of the diet.”

“With research highlighting the growing importance of Vitamin D to lower the risk of a range of chronic diseases, the humble mushroom may play an even more important role in delivering key vitamins and minerals into the Australian diet,” Mr Cardwell said.

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