



VITAMIN D INADEQUACY MAY EXACERBATE CHRONIC PAIN

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SAN FRANCISCO — Approximately one in four patients who suffer from chronic pain also have inadequate blood levels of vitamin D, possibly contributing to their ongoing pain, according to a new study. Patients lacking sufficient vitamin D also required higher doses of morphine for a longer period of time.

Researchers recorded the serum vitamin D levels of 267 adults undergoing outpatient treatment for chronic pain, as well as their pain medication (morphine) dose and duration of use, and physical and general health functioning.

Of the patients tested, 26 percent had vitamin D inadequacy. Among these patients, the morphine dose was nearly twice that of the group with adequate vitamin D levels. In addition, the vitamin D inadequacy group used morphine for an average of 71.1 months versus 43.8 months. The vitamin D deficient group also reported lower levels of physical functioning and had a poorer view of their overall health.

It has long been known that inadequate levels of vitamin D can cause pain and muscle weakness, according to the study author, W. Michael Hooten, M.D., medical director, and anesthesiologist at Mayo Comprehensive Pain Rehabilitation Center, Rochester, Minnesota. Previous studies also have suggested that pain-related symptoms of vitamin D inadequacy respond poorly to pain medications.

However, “this is the first time that we have established the prevalence of vitamin D inadequacy among a diverse group of chronic pain patients,” Dr. Hooten said.

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“The implications are that in chronic pain patients, vitamin D inadequacy is not the principal cause of pain and muscle weakness, however, it could be a contributing but unrecognized factor,” Dr. Hooten said.

Vitamin D inadequacy can be “easily and inexpensively” treated “with essentially no side effects” using a prescription supplement, once or twice a week for four to six weeks, Dr. Hooten said. Further study is needed to determine whether treating inadequate vitamin D levels will result in improvements to the overall general health for patients with chronic pain.

Founded in 1905, the American Society of Anesthesiologists is an educational, research and scientific association with 41,000 members organized to raise and maintain the standards of the medical practice of anesthesiology and improve the care of the patient. Visit our Web site at www.asahq.org.

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