

Swine Flu

Vitamin D, the New (Old) Flu Fix

Wouldn't it be nice if there was a cheap, effective, fast, and completely safe way to protect ourselves from flu? There is, but first, what's wrong with vaccines?

Drawbacks of Flu Vaccine

Besides the time lag for creating a new flu vaccine, there are other problems. For instance, the New York Times reports that "the influenza vaccine, which has been strongly recommended for people over 65 for more than four decades" appears ineffective since "people over 70... account for three-fourths of all flu deaths." (<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/02/health/02flu.html>)

Young children are the other vulnerable population yet a systematic review of 51 studies involving 260,000 children age 6 to 23 months found no evidence that the flu vaccine is any more effective than a placebo (*Cochrane Database Syst Rev.* 2006;1:CD004879).

Worst of all, there was a ten-fold increase in Alzheimer's for people who got flu vaccinations for 3 to 5 years, compared to people who did not have any flu shots (*Int J Clin Invest* 2005;1:1-4). These stats probably explain why seventy percent of doctors do not get a flu shot.

<http://www.craigfoster.com/craigfosterblog/2008/11/18/doctor-recommends-avoiding-flu-shot-taking-vitamin-d-instead/>

A Better Way

Have you heard of the hormone called cholecalciferol? No? OK, it's better known as vitamin D! (D3 to be specific; another form, D2, AKA ergocalciferol, is found in mushrooms, and is absorbed well, but leaves the body too quickly to do much good.)

Since nine out of ten Americans are below the optimum level of D, according to NIH (<http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/vitamind.asp>), that means nearly everyone has a hobbled immune system.

D depletion is associated with higher production of an antimicrobial peptide called hCAP-18, a protein that works with the immune system to kill pathogens, "so you don't get an infection," says Dr. Adit Ginde, U of Colorado Med School.

<http://www.sciam.com/blog/60-second-science/post.cfm?id=vitamin-d-deficiency-linked-to-more-2009-02-23>

1918 Mystery Solved

One of the mysteries of the Spanish Flu epidemic in 1918 was that instead of killing weak elders and children, most of the dead were healthy and between 25 and 45. Researchers now know that if the body's macrophages attack infected tissue too fiercely, the resulting inflammation can kill the person. Ample vitamin D prevents macrophages from releasing too many inflammatory agents, such as interleukin-2 and interferon gamma, the two cytokines that cause macrophages and cytotoxic T cells to attack the body's tissues.

One Doc's Experience

Dr. John Cannell's observation in 2005 at the Atascadero State Hospital led to an important medical insight. He writes:

As the [flu] epidemic progressed, I noticed something unusual. First, the ward below mine was infected, and then the ward on my right, left, and across the hall - but no patients on my ward became ill. My patients had intermingled with patients from infected wards before the quarantines. The nurses on my unit cross-covered on infected wards. Surely, my patients were exposed to the influenza A virus. How did my patients escape infection from what some think is the most infectious of all the respiratory viruses?

Finally, he realized:

All of the patients on my ward had been taking 2,000 units of vitamin D every day for several months or longer. Could that be the reason none of my patients caught the flu?

The next step was:

I experimented, first on myself and then on my family, trying different doses of vitamin D to see if it has any effects on viral respiratory infections. After that, as the word spread, several of my medical colleagues experimented on themselves by taking three-day courses of pharmacological doses (2,000 units per kilogram per day) of vitamin D at the first sign of the flu. I also asked numerous colleagues and friends who were taking physiological doses of vitamin D (5,000 units per day in the winter and less, or none, in the summer) if they ever got colds or the flu, and, if so, how severe the infections were. I became convinced that physiological doses of vitamin D reduce the incidence of viral respiratory infections and that pharmacological doses significantly ameliorate the symptoms of some viral respiratory infections if taken early in the course of the illness. However, such observations are so personal, so likely to be biased, that they are worthless science. <http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/51913.php>

But that year's flu season showed Dr. Cannell that he was on the right track and now all of us can benefit, and subsequent research validates his hypothesis.

The Vitamin D Story

How could a vitamin, a hormone actually, be so powerful? Dr. Anthony Norman discovered that D was a hormone 40 years ago, and the trickle of research has turned into a tidal wave since then. Now we know that nearly every cell has receptors for D, that it affects 32 organ systems, that it affects 900+ genes, and that Americans are getting more deficient every year. "Overall, the mean [average] blood serum 25(OH)D level in the U.S. population was 30 nanograms per milliliter during the 1988-1994 collection, [but] decreased to 24 nanograms per milliliter during the 2001-2004 collection," a recent study found. In other words, in 10 years, Americans' average blood level, which was already low, dropped another 20%, to 24 ng/mL.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0954682008000000>

Lifeguards and farmers, who are the gold standard for blood levels of D because they make their own D from sunlight and the body won't make more than is needed, have blood serum levels of about 100 ng/mL. The new American average is only a quarter of optimum!

Part of the problem is that old fashioned public health advice ("A spoon of cod liver oil every day in winter"-- a good source of D) has been supplanted by commercial interests-- children's cough and fever remedies don't prevent illness but only provide symptomatic relief. Also we spend less time outdoors and use sunscreen more. D-rich fish is no longer the poor person's protein but is now a luxury, and we have banned D-rich lard from our tables.

FDA's Tiny RDA

But the more insidious problem is that the FDA is ignoring the experts. Until the official RDA (recommended daily allowance) is increased-- and the experts say it should go up to 2000 IU-- no one will notice we aren't getting enough. One-a-day multiple supplements are only allowed to provide 200 IU; school meals can only be fortified up to that level.

Follow the Money

And why would the FDA not want us to have a higher RDA? A related question: Why did Medicare announce it will not pay for any blood D tests except if the doctor suspects osteoporosis? In other words, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, are not "legitimate" reasons for checking a person's blood level of D, despite the mountains of research showing that D prevents and remediates these conditions. Who was in the room when these decisions to downplay D were made? Could it be the pharmaceutical industry, the people who make so much money off prescriptions for these diseases?

Guillain-Barre' Syndrome

In 1976, near the end of the annual flu season, an Army recruit stationed at Ft. Dix in New Jersey died, and four of his bunkmates became ill from a flu that was labeled "Swine Flu." Health officials said that the virus appeared to be very similar to the one that had caused the deadly Spanish flu epidemic in 1918. A vaccine was prepared for the next year, but after 45 million Americans had been immunized the program was stopped because (1) the flu appeared to be a non-starter and (2) the vaccine caused paralysis, called Guillain-Barre' syndrome, in hundreds of recipients. The U.S. government paid out nearly \$93 million in legal settlements.

Then we had SARS, bird flu, and West Nile virus. None turned out to be the pandemics they were supposed to be.

What's wrong with Tamiflu?

One more reason to consider D for prevention and treatment is that the main treatment, Tamiflu (oseltamivir), has side effects like difficulty in breathing, swelling lips, tongue, face, or hives, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, dizziness, fatigue, cough. Also note that Japan banned this drug for children back in 2007, after links to suicidal behavior.

<http://www.buzzle.com/articles/tamiflu-treatment-and-prevention-of-influenza.html>

Other neurologic and behavioral symptoms of Tamiflu include hallucinations, delirium and abnormal behavior.

http://pediatrics.about.com/od/childhoodmedications/a/08_side_effects.htm

Healthy Profits

One financial analyst told the Associated Press there could be up to \$388 million worth of Tamiflu sales in the near future, and that's before sales due to a possible pandemic.

Stock in Gilead Sciences Inc., Roche, GlaxoSmithKline and others with a stake in flu treatments and detection, have risen in recent days, and probably will keep rising.

Rewarding "Mistakes"

In Dr. Joseph Mercola's new 10 page article on Swine Flu he reports:

"the American pharmaceutical company Baxter was under investigation for distributing the deadly avian flu virus to 18 different countries as part of a seasonal flu vaccine shipment. Czech reporters were probing to see if it may have been part of a deliberate attempt to start a pandemic; as such a "mistake" would be virtually impossible under the security protocols of that virus.

The H5N1 virus on its own is not very airborne. However, when combined with seasonal flu viruses, which are more easily spread, the effect could be a potent, airborne, deadly biological weapon. If this batch of live bird flu and seasonal flu viruses had reached the public, it could have resulted in dire consequences. . . . Lo and behold, which company has been chosen to head up efforts, along with WHO, to produce a vaccine against the Mexican swine flu? Baxter!"

<http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2009/04/29/Swine-Flu.aspx>

What's the Right Dose of D?

Experts say 10,000 IU a day is the top safe amount but, in fact, people have safely taken as much as 30,000 IU a day for months. For flu protection, Mayer Eisenstein, MD, recommends that adults take 5000 IU a day. That's reasonable when you consider that a pale person in a bathing suit on a beach, at noon, in summer, can make four times that much, 20,000 IU, in half an hour (people with more melanin take longer).

The only problem with taking vitamin D to protect you from flu is that it's hard to find a large enough dose in the stores, which still sell the picayune 400 IU or 1000 IU capsules. But more stores have 4000 IU capsules, you could take two one day and one the next to reach 35,000 IU a week.

Good News for Parents

Vitamin D doesn't have to taste like fish! D3 also comes from sheep lanolin, often sold as a powder inside capsules. Just open the capsule and stir the powder into food. Figure on 30 IU a day for each pound a child weighs.

More Info

Please see GoodSchoolFood.org