

Vitamin D Does Not Prevent Cancer

It has been argued that vitamin D might have a protective effect on several internal cancers. Sunlight is a potent producer of vitamin D. Some have even recommended exposure to ultraviolet radiation to lessen the risk of internal cancer.

This is a summary of a paper recently published by Lindelöf et al. The reference is: *Lindelöf B, Krynitz B, Ayoubi S, Martschin C, Wiegleb-Edström D, Wiklund K. Previous extensive sun exposure and subsequent vitamin D production in patients with basal cell carcinoma of the skin, has no protective effect on internal cancers. Eur J Cancer 2011 Jul 23. [Epub ahead of print]*

In the current study, Lindelöf and co-workers made a case-control study in the whole Swedish population comparing 111,016 patients with basal cell carcinoma with 987,893 controls. The risk of other skin cancers was increased (OR=4.95) but also the risk for non-skin cancer was increased (OR=1.37). Adjustments were made for age, income level, occupation, place of living and sex.

The authors specifically looked at several cancers: colon, prostate, breast and ovarian cancers. They all had slightly increased OR. No increased OR were found for pancreatic and gastric cancer.

Lindelöf et al. emphasizes several limitations with the study. The Swedish Cancer Registry started to register basal cell carcinoma (BCC) in 2004 in contrast to other forms of cancers which have been followed for decades. Also, registration of BCCs are not as carefully conducted as for other cancers.

There is also a risk of surveillance bias as patients with a cancer more often see a doctor. The authors stress that they have no information on actual vitamin D levels.

In conclusion, the study does not support a protective effect of sunlight for the development of internal cancers.

The study is an excellent example of what can be achieved with Swedish registries and Lindelöf is a master of using registries. The issue of vitamin D protecting against internal cancers has been debated intensely the last few years. The current study will add on to this.



Bernt Lindelöf has devoted much of his life to epidemiological research and is internationally highly recognized for his work with using registries. He is a Professor at Karolinska institutet since many years.

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