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Boost vitamin D level to avoid severe Covid, says UAE study

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Astudy of 522 Covid-19 patients in the UAE has found a strong relation between vitamin D deficiency and severe Covid-19 infection. Since more than 70 per cent of the UAE population is known to be vitamin D deficient, the health authorities have urged residents to boost vitamin D levels. The study was conducted by Dr Habiba Al Safar at the Khalifa University's Centre for Biotechnology, and Dr Fatme Al Anouti, associate professor of Clinical Biochemistry at Zayed University.

Adult patients

It found that 59 per cent of surveyed Covid-19 patients with Vitamin D deficiency suffered more severe Covid-19 symptoms. The patients were all aged 18 years and older.

The Emirati study's findings are in keeping with international findings. In fact, experts vouched for the protective effect of the sunshine vitamin at the Abu Dhabi Annual International Conference on Vitamin D Deficiency and Human Health held in September 2020. As Gulf News reported at the time, the experts believed that sufficient Vitamin D levels help prevent severe autoimmune responses like the cytokine storm seen in some patients.

"There is good, experimental, laboratory evidence that vitamin D can have direct antiviral activity. In other words, it can suppress the reproduction or replication of the virus at the site of infection.

"In addition, the vitamin also suppresses the cytokine storms — the out-of-control inflammatory response — that you see in some patients with Covid-19," said Dr John White, chair of the Department of Physiology at the McGill University in Canada.

Dr White added that studies would show in a few months, when the result of Covid-19 clinical trials were in, that sufficient vitamin D helps suppress Covid-19 infections severity. The study conducted in Abu Dhabi is confirmation of Dr White's beliefs.

Advice from researchers

Dr Al Anouti, one of the study's researchers, has also supplied tips on how to ensure Vitamin D sufficiency.

"In many Arctic countries like Canada, people are recommended to take supplements during the winter months, when there is no sunlight. Here in the UAE, even with abundant sunlight, people tend to stay indoors all year round, and this prevents them from getting Vitamin D naturally. So it is a good idea to take Vitamin D supplements, especially if you have risk factors for being deficient," she told