New Study Suggests Vitamin D Deficiency During Pregnancy May Contribute to the Development of MS in the Offspring

Washington, D.C., March 8, 2016—It is important to correct a vitamin D deficiency during pregnancy, since low levels of vitamin D could result in the birth of an infant who might be at increased risk of developing multiple sclerosis (MS) in adulthood. That’s the finding from a study published online March 7 in the medical journal JAMA Neurology¹.

Previous research has shown that higher vitamin D blood levels and intake are associated with a lower risk of developing MS. This most recent study identifies a potential link between a pregnant woman having low levels of vitamin D and her adult offspring developing MS. Based on levels of vitamin D in blood collected during early pregnancy from mothers, the Finnish researchers found that there was a 90% increased risk of developing MS as an adult among the children of the vitamin D-deficient mothers. The researchers conclude: “Correcting maternal vitamin D deficiency in early pregnancy may have a beneficial effect on risk of MS in the offspring.”

Although the researchers point out that their study does not provide any information about a dose-response effect by increasing levels of vitamin D sufficiency, according to Andrea Wong, Ph.D., vice president, scientific and regulatory affairs, Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN), “It’s common sense that raising vitamin D levels might make a difference, and as a woman, I believe that if there’s any chance that a woman could reduce the risk of her unborn child’s developing MS later in life, that’s something a mother-to-be would strongly consider—especially if it’s doing something as simple as adding a vitamin D supplement daily.” Dr. Wong added, “The Finnish Maternity Cohort study is an important and promising


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investigation, and we agree with the authors that more research is needed to learn more definitively how vitamin D supplementation may help prevent the devastation of our children developing multiple sclerosis later in life.”

The body of scientific research demonstrating the importance of vitamin D continues to grow. Studies have shown that vitamin D plays an important role in bone health and immune function, and may have a positive effect on cardiovascular disease in adults. Vitamin D supplements help fill nutrient gaps that are difficult to achieve from diet alone.

The correlation between vitamin D deficiency in pregnancy leading to MS in the adult offspring is one more demonstration of how important it is for a woman to take nutritional supplements while pregnant. For example, folic acid has long been known to be an essential component of prenatal vitamins, since it can help prevent major birth defects such as spina bifida. Pregnant women whose diets don’t contain enough iodine are advised to take iodine supplements, since iodine is also important for healthy brain development. Mothers who are deficient in iodine during pregnancy also have a higher risk of giving birth to pre-term and low birth weight babies, or to babies with cognitive impairment. Omega-3 fatty acid supplements are another important nutrient for pregnant women to consider, since they’re essential for the baby’s normal cognitive and visual development.

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**Note to Editor:** The Council for Responsible Nutrition (CRN), founded in 1973, is a Washington, D.C.-based trade association representing 150+ dietary supplement and functional food manufacturers, ingredient suppliers, and companies providing services to those manufacturers and suppliers. In addition to complying with a host of federal and state regulations governing dietary supplements and food in the areas of manufacturing, marketing, quality control and safety, our manufacturer and supplier members also agree to adhere to additional voluntary guidelines as well as to CRN’s Code of Ethics. Visit [www.crnusa.org](http://www.crnusa.org). Follow us on Twitter [@crn_supplements](https://twitter.com/crn_supplements) and [@wannabewell](https://twitter.com/wannabewell) and on Facebook.