

More support for vitamin D



by **Andrew Conner**

There is increasing evidence that vitamin D may help to reduce the effects of multiple sclerosis. Funded by the National MS Society and the National Institutes of Health, a team of Harvard researchers recently analyzed data on vitamin D intake and MS risk and progression that was collected in the BENEFIT study. This study evaluated the effectiveness of early interferon beta-1b (IFNB-1b) treatment in 465 people who had experienced a clinically isolating syndrome, or CIS, a single neurologic episode that indicates high risk for developing MS.

In the BENEFIT study, one group of participants received IFNB-1b immediately, while the other group received it later. All of the participants in the study had at least one vitamin D measurement taken, and 334 of them had two. Participants were followed for five years, and the Harvard researchers found that those who had higher blood levels of vitamin D, regardless of whether they were taking interferon treatments, had been less likely to progress to a diagnosis of definite MS. They also had a significantly lower amount of new disease activity, brain tissue volume loss and MS progression.

While this study offers more promise for the effects of vitamin D on MS, research in this area is ongoing. The study's researchers noted, "Further investigations are needed to determine the optimal levels of vitamin D and whether results apply to different races or ethnicities, to people with the secondary- or primary-progressive course of MS, or in combination with drugs other than IFNB-1b [interferon]."

A Society-supported clinical trial is currently underway to test whether vitamin D supplements, added to standard therapy, will benefit people with MS. People who have questions or concerns about their vitamin D levels should consult their doctors before taking

any action. A blood test can determine vitamin D levels, if necessary. Visit nationalMSSociety.org/vitaminD for more information and the latest research.

To learn more about the Harvard study, visit nationalMSSociety.org/vitaminD.