Review Finds Vitamin B6 Beneficial for Colorectal Health

By Greg Arnold, DC, CSCS, March 26, 2010, abstracted from “Vitamin B6 and Risk of Colorectal Cancer: A Meta-analysis of Prospective Studies” in the March 2010 issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association

As the second leading cause of death from cancer (behind lung cancer) in the United States, colorectal cancer claims more than 55,000 Americans each year. While 140,000 new cases are diagnosed each year, it is estimated that one in four Americans (80 to 90 million Americans) are considered at risk because of age or other factors. Colorectal cancer, contrary to what most people believe, affects both men and women equally (1).

Fortunately, there are a number of natural ways to help benefit colon health. These include calcium (2), conjugated linoleic acid (3), green tea (4), fiber (5), olive oil (6), apples (7), omega-3 fats (8) and magnesium (9). When it comes to vitamin B6, studies in 2008 and 2009 (11) found benefits for digestive health at intakes greater than 3.39 mg per day (10) and 144 picomoles per milliliter (11). Now a new study (12) has again confirmed B6’s benefits for digestive health.

In the study, researchers reviewed nine studies examining vitamin B6 intake and four studies looking at vitamin B6 blood levels and their effect on colorectal cancer risk (called a meta-analysis). They found that the highest intakes of vitamin B6 (3.1 mg per day in females and 5.4 mg/day in males (13) and blood levels of vitamin B6 (112 picomoles per day) (14) produced a 10% and 48% reduced risk of colorectal cancer, respectively.

Although there was only a 10% decreased risk of colorectal cancer shown in the nine studies, this decreased risk jumped to 20% when one of the studies was omitted (15) because the study “contributed substantially to the [varying results]” of the review”. This is called “heterogeneity” (16), which the researchers attributed to poor methods used in the study. They also found that the risk of colorectal cancer decreased by 49% for every 100-picromol per milliliter increase in blood vitamin B6 blood levels.

For the researchers, “Vitamin B6 intake and blood PLP levels were inversely associated with the risk of colorectal cancer in this meta-analysis.”

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Reference:
1. “Colorectal Cancer Fact Sheet” posted on the Foundation for Digestive Health and Nutrition Website www.fdhn.org/htm/education/colorectal/facts.html

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12. Larsson SC. Vitamin B6 and Risk of Colorectal Cancer: A Meta-analysis of Prospective Studies *JAMA.* 2010;303(11):1077-1083