

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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NEW STUDY WILL TEST EFFECTIVENESS OF B VITAMINS IN PREVENTING STROKES

DALLAS — August 14, 1997 — UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas is participating in a new multicenter study to determine if increased vitamin intake can reduce individuals' likelihood of suffering recurrent strokes.

UT Southwestern is the only Texas site for the two-year study, which will evaluate the benefits of adding high doses of folic acid, vitamin B-6 and vitamin B-12 to a well-managed treatment program that includes risk modification.

To be eligible, patients must have experienced a cerebral infarction, or stroke, within the past 120 days and have an elevated level of the blood chemical homocysteine.

Homocysteine has been linked to plaque development in arteries and clot formation in veins, both of which can restrict blood flow to the heart and brain. Prior investigation has indicated a strong association between elevated levels of homocysteine and stroke risk. A correlation also has been drawn between homocysteine and coronary disease. One study found that 42 percent of patients under age 55 with cerebrovascular disease, 28 percent with peripheral vascular disease and 30 percent with coronary artery disease had higher than average blood levels of homocysteine.

"This is the first major study designed to determine if patients can be protected against further strokes by taking certain vitamins," said Dr. Hal Unwin, associate professor of neurology at UT Southwestern and local coordinator for the research project. Dr. Ralph Greenlee, professor of neurological surgery and the Ed and Sue Rose Distinguished Professor in Neurology at UT Southwestern and director of the Pauline Gill Sullivan Diagnostic and Treatment Center for Neurological Disorders at Zale Lipshy University Hospital, also is

(MORE)

NEW STUDY — 2

participating in the research study.

Patients taking part in the study will be given 2.5 milligrams of folic acid, 25 mg of B-6 and 400 mg of B-12 daily. Similar combinations reduced homocysteine significantly (up to 60 percent) in recent, small-scale studies. Lesser responses have been noted in other trials measuring the effects of the vitamin supplements individually.

The B vitamins included in this study play key roles in homocysteine metabolism. Researchers believe inadequate intake of folic acid is the leading cause of elevated homocysteine levels.

Statistics indicate the rate of cerebral infarction may be increasing. Of all patients with acute cerebral infarctions, 14 percent die within 30 days, 13 percent recover to "normal," 18 percent to 24 percent have minimal lasting effects, 18 percent to 24 percent are severely impaired, and the remaining 25 percent are good candidates for rehabilitation.

Cerebral infarctions have a high rate of recurrence. The one-year rate stands at 15.3 percent. Many of those who suffer recurrences eventually become physically disabled or develop vascular dementia.

UT Southwestern is one of 36 clinical centers participating in the project, which is being organized by the Bowman Gray School of Medicine of Wake Forest University. Each center will try to enroll at least 50 patients per year for two years. Each patient will be tested periodically for the next two years in the double-blind, randomized, controlled trial.

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