

Do everyday foods influence risk of prostate cancer?

The biggest ever study on the effect of folate and vitamin B12 on prostate cancer is set to go ahead at Bristol University after World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) announced it would fund the project.

The £147,971 grant will enable the team of scientists to research whether folate and vitamin B12 alter a man's risk of prostate cancer. Folate is found in green leafy vegetables, nuts and bread and the main source of vitamin B12 is meat, eggs and dairy products.

Previous research has shown conflicting results, but so far studies in people have been based on only a small numbers of cases. The Bristol team will test 1,500 men with prostate cancer and 1,500 men without.

The results will provide the team with robust information on whether folate and vitamin B12 influence the risk of prostate cancer and its progression. This information could be translated into a set of recommendations that will be applicable to the wider public.

Leading the study is Dr Richard Martin at the Department of Social Medicine, who said: "It's very important that we find how we can help men reduce their risk of prostate cancer and how to stop it spreading. A number of studies have looked at the effects of folate but we still don't have a final answer. That's why this study is important and I hope this will help to form nutrition advice in the future."

Dr Greg Martin, Head of Science and Research at WCRF, said: "This piece of research is very important as prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men, affecting 35,000 men in the UK every year. We already know that what we eat is important for our well-being and this study could set new guidelines for men on what they should eat to look after themselves."

Levels of folate in the body can be measured from blood samples. Levels are related to how much folate is consumed although people metabolise it in different ways, which will affect the measurement. This study will look at whether men with low levels of folate in the blood are more or less likely to have the disease. Genes also have a role and the project will look at whether particular genes that affect levels of folate in the blood are linked to risk of prostate cancer or its progression.

Prostate cancer affects around 35,000 men each year, the majority of which will be over the age of 70. The disease is quite rare in men under 50.

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) helps people make choices that reduce their chances of developing cancer.

This includes research and education programmes on how cancer risk is related to diet, physical activity, and weight management.

The WCRF report, called Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer, was launched in November 2007 and is the most comprehensive report ever published on the link between cancer and lifestyle.

Source: University of Bristol

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