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NEWS IN BRIEF

Researchers discover 'normal' function of vitamin E

21-Dec-2011

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Scientists claim to have uncovered the first evidence for one of vitamin E's normal bodily functions.

The team of researchers found that the powerful antioxidant – found in most foods – helps to repair tears in the membranes that protect cells from outside forces, and also screen what enters and exit the cells.

Writing in the journal *Nature Communications*, the team said that vitamin E appears to be essential to repair of plasma membranes – noting that century-old animal studies linked vitamin E deficiency to muscle problems, but how that happened remained a mystery until now.

Lead researcher Dr. Paul McNeil, of the Georgia Health Sciences University, USA, said that whilst we consume enough vitamin E "without any special effort," until now researchers had no idea what its primary function in the human body was.

"We don't even know what it does in our bodies," he said, adding that at least he now feels confident about at least one of its functions.

The study showed that vitamin E treatment in an animal model of diabetes restored some membrane repair ability. Also, an analogue of the most biologically active form of vitamin E significantly reversed membrane repair deficits caused by high glucose and increased cell survival after tearing.

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