

The role of vitamin D in MS risk – webinar with Professor Robyn Lucas

24th November, 2015



Low levels of vitamin D, UV radiation, and sun exposure are well established risk factors for MS. However, it is not yet clear whether supplementation of these factors could prevent MS onset, or influence MS progression. This field of research is a key strength of Australian researchers, including Professor Robyn Lucas from the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University in Canberra.

Professor Lucas recently presented a Research Update webinar hosted by MS Research Australia and MS-ACT/VIC/NSW. She spoke about her work looking at environmental effects on immune system function, including diseases such as MS, and the effects of ultraviolet radiation and vitamin D on health in general.

MS is a complex disease resulting from a combination of genetic and environmental risk factors that all interact to contribute to the onset of MS. Professor Lucas explains how each individual has a unique set of risk factors, and the precise components that combine to cause MS may be different in each person. Changing or removing only one of these factors may completely alter a person's risk of disease. Many of the known MS risk factors can be modified, especially the environmental factors (such as sun exposure, smoking, diet), and as we learn more about how these risk factors interact with the immune system they offer hope for future preventative strategies.

Professor Lucas was a key investigator on the long-running [Ausimmune study](#) that made a number of significant discoveries relating to environmental influences in MS, including furthering our understanding of the [latitude gradient of MS](#). Professor Lucas is also a member of the steering committee for the ongoing MS Research Australia [PrevANZ trial](#). This study aims to investigate whether vitamin D supplements can delay or prevent the progression from a clinically isolated syndrome (first demyelinating event) to clinically definite MS.

Studying components of sun exposure and their effects on the immune system is a strength of Australian researchers. Another study that Professor Lucas is involved with, together with Western Australian researcher Professor Prue Hart, is the [PhoCIS study](#), is a NHMRC-funded randomised controlled trial investigating the effects of UV-B narrow band phototherapy for preventing the development of MS in people with CIS.

You can watch a recording of the [webinar here](#).