



Is a bad memory due to a lack of vitamin D?

The University of WA is leading a world-first investigation into the effect of vitamin D on dementia.

The research, overseen by Associate Professor Nicola Lautenschlager from the school of psychiatry and clinical neurosciences, will study whether low levels of the vitamin are linked to a loss of memory.

The research has been made possible after UWA secured \$28 million from a \$4.4 million national grants pool from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) for dementia research.

From this, \$619,000 will be used for the vitamin D research, which will be done at Royal Perth Hospital.

It will look at 110 people who have low levels of vitamin D and have memory problems.

They may have a hard time learning something new but are still able to do things like driving a car and pursuing hobbies.

Professor Lautenschlager said: "The research targets a hot area at the moment in medical dementia research, and we're looking at what things might be out there which might delay the progression to dementia or ideally prevent it from happening at all.

"The approval of the funding by the government shows it has identified this is an important area, as the population is getting older.

"Unfortunately, statistically, if you're an older person and have mild memory problems, your risk to eventually progress and develop dementia is much higher com-

pared with someone who has no memory problems of the same age."

The aim of the study is to help older people have a healthy lifestyle by finding ways to prevent dementia or by identifying factors that trigger its onset.

Professor Lautenschlager said the link between dementia and vitamin D was relatively new and had not been researched before.

"We know there has been no publication in the medical literature reporting on what we try to do, connecting memory deficiency with vitamin D.

"But there are some indicators that something relevant is happening."

Research on mice and rats has shown a connection, and trials around the world and in Australia focusing on vitamin D and frailty on older residents in care have shown a link with diminished cognition.

In addition, a small trial carried out by UWA Professor Leon Flicker, an expert in geriatric medicine, noticed older patients who had the biggest deficiency in vitamin D also had the biggest problems with memory loss.

Professor Lautenschlager said most people knew vitamin D to be linked with sunlight, but as people got older the body's ability to absorb the vitamin through the skin decreased.

So people needed to rely on absorbing the vitamin through foods such as fish and eggnog.

The 18-month study began in February.