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The Role of Vitamin D in Immune Balance and Inflammation

Kurnia Maidarmi Handayani[1*], Widia Sari[2], Ghaniyyatul Khudri[3], Alief Dhuha[2]

[1] Department of Biochemistry and Nutrition, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Baiturrahmah, Padang, Indonesia
E-mail : kurnia_maidarmi@fk.unbrah.ac.d
[2] Department of Anatomy, Physiology, and Radiology, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Baiturrahmah, Padang, Indonesia
[3]Department of Histology and Immunology, Faculty of Medicine, Universitas Baiturrahmah, Padang, Indonesia

Abstract

Vitamin D, traditionally known for its role in bone health, is increasingly recognized as a crucial regulator of immune balance and inflammation. This review explores the mechanisms by which vitamin D influences both innate and adaptive immune responses, with a focus on immune cells like macrophages, dendritic cells, T cells, and B cells. Vitamin D, through its active form, calcitriol, modulates immune cell function by binding to the Vitamin D receptor (VDR), which impacts cytokine production and inflammatory pathways. Notably, vitamin D promotes anti-inflammatory effects by shifting immune responses towards a regulatory phenotype, reducing pro-inflammatory cytokines while enhancing anti-inflammatory signals. This regulatory potential highlight vitamin D's therapeutic value for inflammatory and autoimmune diseases. Further research is essential to determine optimal vitamin D dosing and its implications across diverse populations.

Keywords— *Autoimmune disease, cytokines, inflammation, immune regulation, vitamin D*

I. INTRODUCTION

Inflammation is a critical physiological response to injury or infection, playing a fundamental role in the immune system's ability to protect the body. However, when inflammation becomes chronic, it can drive the pathogenesis of various diseases, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, and cancer. This persistent state of inflammation, often referred to as "chronic low-grade inflammation," represents an ongoing immune activation that contributes to tissue damage and disease progression. Recognizing and understanding the factors that can influence chronic inflammation are key to identifying potential therapeutic targets for these widespread conditions.[1]

Recent research has highlighted Vitamin D as a modulator of the immune system, with potential implications for inflammation control. Traditionally recognized for its essential role in bone health and calcium homeostasis, Vitamin D is now understood to play a more complex role in immune regulation, particularly through its anti-inflammatory properties. The active form of Vitamin D, 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D3 (calcitriol), influences both the innate and adaptive immune responses by regulating the production of pro- and anti-inflammatory cytokines. This cytokine modulation suggests a protective role for Vitamin D against the development of chronic inflammation and related diseases.[2]

Vitamin D exerts its immune effects through the Vitamin D receptor (VDR), which is found on numerous immune cells, including macrophages, dendritic cells, and T and B lymphocytes. Once Vitamin D binds to VDR, it regulates gene expression related to immune responses. This VDR-mediated mechanism helps balance pro- and anti-inflammatory cytokine production, which is essential for maintaining immune homeostasis. This regulation is particularly vital for preventing excessive immune activation, which is commonly associated with chronic inflammatory and autoimmune diseases.[3]

A study by Hewison (2012) discussed the critical function of VDR in immune cells, showing that activation of VDR leads to the suppression of the NF-κB signaling pathway, a major regulator of inflammatory responses. The study also indicated that the expression of VDR in immune cells is upregulated in response to infections or inflammation, suggesting that immune cells become more responsive to the anti-inflammatory effects of Vitamin D during these states. Despite these promising insights, gaps remain in understanding the variability of VDR expression across different populations and how factors like age or pre-existing conditions affect VDR activity.[4]

Despite this promising evidence, we aim to review the understanding of how Vitamin D impact inflammation, including macrophage differentiation, phagocytosis, cytokine signaling, dendritic cell function, and T cell modulation. Further research is needed to clarify these molecular effects and the implications of Vitamin D deficiency or supplementation on immune health and chronic inflammation across different populations.

II. REVIEW

A. OVERVIEW OF VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is an essential nutrient for the body. Like the hormones produced by the adrenal glands and sex hormones, this vitamin also originates from steroids.[6] In addition to maintaining the balance of bones, calcium, and phosphate, vitamin D also plays a crucial role in the cardiovascular system, cancer prevention, and functions as an anti-inflammatory and immunomodulator.[7] Experts argue that vitamin D is not merely a vitamin but can also be classified as a

hormone. This opinion arises because vitamin D is the only vitamin that can be produced by the body and acts on target cells located far from its production site. Furthermore, vitamin D has wide-ranging effects on the body.[6]

Vitamin D has two different precursor molecules: vitamin D3 and vitamin D2. Vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol) is the primary source of vitamin D for the body, produced through sun exposure on the skin's epidermis, from animal-based foods (such as fish and egg yolks), or from vitamin supplements (Figure 1). Vitamin D2 (ergocalciferol) is derived from plants and is typically used for vitamin D supplementation.[7,8]

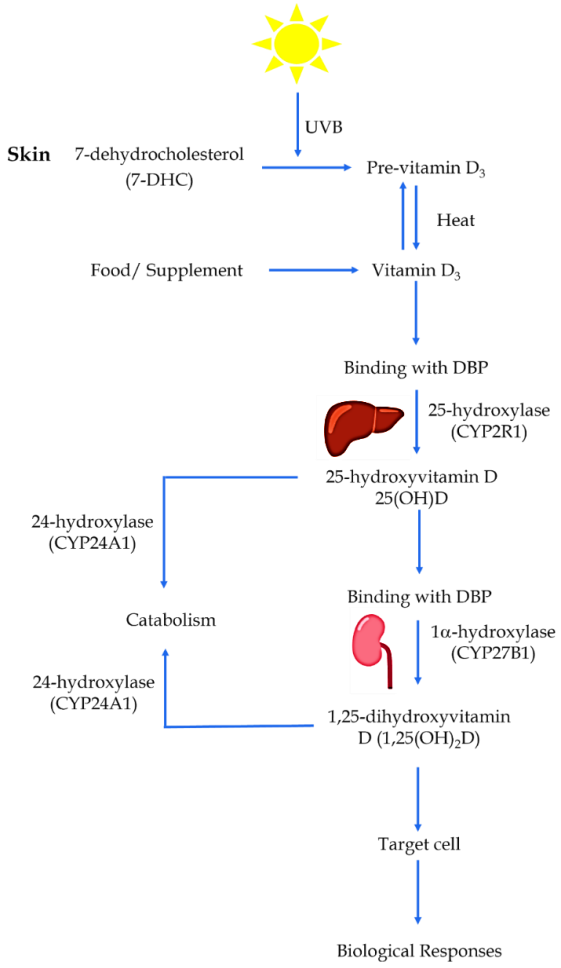

FIGURE 1. VITAMIN D METABOLISM[5]

B. MOLECULAR AND BIOMCHEMICAL PATHWAY OF VITAMIN D

The process of vitamin D synthesis begins with the formation of vitamin, which is produced in the epidermis by reacting with 7-dehydrocholesterol (7-DHC) in response to ultraviolet B (UVB) radiation. UVB rays break the B-ring of 7-DHC, forming pre-vitamin D (pre-D3). Subsequently, pre-D3 is isomerized to form vitamin D3. This process is non-catalytic and thermosensitive (Figure 2).[5–7]

The production of vitamin D in the epidermis is significantly influenced by the intensity of UVB exposure, as well as factors such as altitude and seasons.[8,9] Skin pigmentation, clothing, and sunscreen application significantly affect vitamin D production. Melanin concentration in the skin inhibits UVB rays from penetrating 7-DHC, consequently diminishing vitamin D synthesis. Black clothing and sunscreen reduce UVB penetration to the skin, thereby impacting vitamin D synthesis. Black cotton clothing effectively blocks around 98.6% of UVB rays, whereas sunscreen functions by reflecting or absorbing UVB, thereby preventing its penetration to the skin.[8]

Vitamin D synthesis is influenced not only by sunlight exposure but also by the availability of 7-DHC, which is contingent upon the activity of the enzyme 7 Dehydrocholesterol Reductase (DHCR7). A reduction in the activity of this enzyme may enhance vitamin D synthesis and decrease cholesterol production.[5] Dietary sources of vitamin D include eggs, fish, liver, and milk, as well as supplements that provide vitamin D3 or D2 directly.[8]

The metabolism of vitamin D involves two hydroxylation mechanisms occurring in the liver and kidneys. These processes are facilitated by cytochrome P450 mixed-function oxidases (CYPs), which are present

in the endoplasmic reticulum and mitochondria. In the liver, vitamin D produced in the skin undergoes hydroxylation to form 25-hydroxyvitamin D (25OHD). Thereafter, 25OHD undergoes hydroxylation to form 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D ($1,25(OH)_2D$) in the kidneys (Fig. 1).[8]

Vitamin D produced in the skin passes through the bloodstream and binds to the vitamin D binding protein (DBP) for circulation in the blood. In the liver, Vitamin D is hydroxylated through the action of the enzymes CYP2R1, CYP27A1, and CYP2D25. These enzymes hydroxylate vitamin D at the C-25 position, producing 25-hydroxyvitamin D (25OHD), commonly referred to as calcidiol. Calcidiol acts as a biomarker for serum vitamin D levels, as it is the primary circulating form of vitamin D in the blood.[8,9]

Calcidiol produced in the liver reaches the circulatory system. As the blood passes through the glomerular capillaries, calcidiol is filtered by the renal glomerulus and reabsorbed in the renal tubules. Calcidiol undergoes hydroxylation in the renal tubules, mediated by the enzyme CYP27B1, the only 1α-hydroxylase responsible for vitamin D hydroxylation in the kidneys, primarily located in the proximal tubules. This enzyme hydroxylates 25(OH)D at the C-1 position of the A-ring, resulting in the active form of vitamin D, known as 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D ($1,25(OH)_2D$), also referred to as calcitriol. The conversion of vitamin D, from its original produced form in the skin to its active form, occurs not only in the liver and kidneys but also in other parts of the body.[8,9]

Calcidiol can be hydroxylated into its inactive form in the kidney's proximal tubules in addition to being hydroxylated into its active form. The catabolic enzyme CYP24A1 facilitates this inactivation process. CYP24A1 not only hydroxylates calcidiol into its inactive state but also hydroxylates calcitriol into an inactive form. The catabolism of calcidiol and calcitriol occurs via 24-hydroxylation and 23-hydroxylation pathways. These pathways produce inactive calcitroic acid and 26,23-lactone, the final metabolites of vitamin D metabolism, which are eliminated from the body through bile or urine.[5,8,9]

Almost all forms of vitamin D are transported in the bloodstream by associating with vitamin D binding protein (DBP). DBP shows a greater affinity for 25(OH)D than for $1,25(OH)_2D$, contributing to the predominance of 25(OH)D in circulation. Approximately 15% of vitamin D is bound to albumin, whereas only about 0.03% of 25(OH)D and approximately 0.4% of $1,25(OH)_2D$ circulate freely in the bloodstream. The transfer of vitamin D from the bloodstream to target cells is mediated by receptors that can identify the vitamin D-DBP complex.[5,6]

C. Modulation of Vitamin D in Inflammation

Vitamin D and Its Role in Immune Modulation

Vitamin D is increasingly recognized for its role in immunomodulation and inflammation regulation, primarily through its active form, 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D_3 ($1,25(OH)_2D_3$ or calcitriol). Calcitriol binds to the vitamin D receptor (VDR) expressed on various immune cells, including macrophages, dendritic cells, and T and B lymphocytes, initiating a series of molecular signaling pathways that impact both innate and adaptive immunity. This interaction modulates gene expression and cellular functions, resulting in reduced production of pro-inflammatory cytokines, such as interleukin-6 (IL-6) and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), and promoting an anti-inflammatory immune response. This regulatory effect of Vitamin D is particularly crucial in preventing immune overactivation,

which can lead to chronic inflammation and the development of autoimmune conditions.

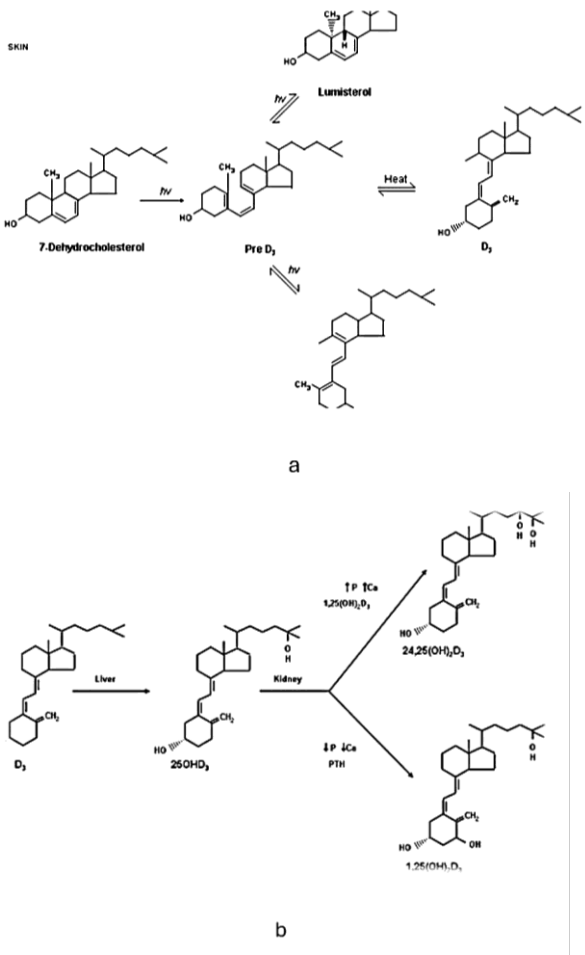

FIGURE 2 A. VITAMIN D3 SYNTHESIS IN SKIN: UVB CONVERTS 7-DEHYDROCHOLESTEROL TO PRE-D3, WHICH THERMALLY REARRANGES INTO D3. CONTINUED UV EXPOSURE PRODUCES LUMISTEROL3 AND TACHYSTEROL3, REVERSIBLE TO PRE-D3 IN DARKNESS.
B. VITAMIN D METABOLISM: THE LIVER CONVERTS D3 TO 25OHD, AND THE KIDNEYS FURTHER HYDROXYLATE IT TO ACTIVE $1,25(OH)_2D$ AND INACTIVE $24,25(OH)_2D$, REGULATED BY CALCIUM, PHOSPHORUS, PTH, FGF23, AND $1,25(OH)_2D$.[7]

EVIDENCE OF ANTI-INFLAMMATORY EFFECTS OF VITAMIN D

Several key studies highlight the immunomodulatory effects of Vitamin D. A study by Jeffery et al. (2019) found that individuals with sufficient levels of Vitamin D exhibited lower levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines, such as interleukin-6 (IL-6) and tumor necrosis factor-alpha (TNF-α), compared to those with Vitamin D deficiency.[10] Similarly, Prietl et al. (2013) demonstrated that Vitamin D supplementation reduced inflammatory markers in patients with metabolic syndrome, suggesting a systemic effect on reducing inflammation. These findings support the hypothesis that Vitamin D has a central role in controlling inflammation by modulating immune cell activity.[11] These findings underscore the potential therapeutic value of Vitamin D in modulating immune responses and controlling inflammation. Nevertheless, further research is needed to establish optimal dosage and supplementation protocols, as responses may vary across populations, thereby refining Vitamin D's role in immune health and inflammation management.

MECHANISM OF VDR ACTIVATION IN IMMUNE CELLS

The Vitamin D_3 metabolite, 1α,25-dihydroxyvitamin D_3 (calcitriol), binds to the Vitamin D receptor (VDR) at very low concentrations, activating it to regulate immune-related genes. This VDR activation is crucial not only for cellular metabolism but also for modulating immune responses, including antimicrobial defenses and T cell tolerance. In innate immunity, monocytes, macrophages, and dendritic cells use VDR signaling to produce antimicrobial peptides and promote a balanced inflammatory response. In adaptive immunity, calcitriol binding to VDR in T cells helps regulate pro- and anti-inflammatory cytokines, supporting immune homeostasis.[12] Overall, VDR is integral to Vitamin D's role in balancing immune responses, yet more research is needed on VDR expression variability and population-specific effects.

VDR EXPRESSION AND ITS CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

A study by Hewison's in 2012 highlights the essential role of VDR in immune cells, demonstrating how VDR activation can suppress the NF-κB signaling pathway, a major regulator of inflammatory responses. The study also indicated that the expression

of VDR in immune cells is upregulated in response to infections or inflammation, suggesting that immune cells become more responsive to the anti-inflammatory effects of Vitamin D during these states.[4] Despite these promising insights, gaps remain in understanding the variability of VDR expression across different populations and how factors like age or pre-existing conditions affect VDR activity.

D. MODULATION OF INNATE CELLS BY VITAMIN D

MACROPHAGES

Vitamin D is essential for regulating macrophage differentiation and maturation, key processes that influence the functional capacity of these immune cells. Macrophages, which originate from monocytes circulating in the bloodstream, differentiate into their mature form upon entering tissues and responding to environmental signals. The active form of vitamin D, 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D3 (calcitriol), plays a critical role in guiding the phenotypic fate of macrophages, by binding to the vitamin D receptor (VDR) on macrophages. It directs their differentiation into either the pro-inflammatory M1 phenotype or the anti-inflammatory M2 phenotype, depending on the immune context. M1 macrophages are typically associated with the production of inflammatory cytokines and reactive oxygen species (ROS), which are vital for combating pathogens and tumor cells. Conversely, M2 macrophages support tissue repair and the resolution of inflammation, promoting a return to homeostasis.[13]

The role of vitamin D extends to the modulation of innate immune responses, particularly through its impact on macrophage activity. This modulation ensures a balanced immune response: M1 macrophages engage in pathogen defense and inflammation, while M2 macrophages contribute to tissue repair and the resolution of inflammation. Vitamin D helps regulate the balance of the immune response, ensuring that inflammation is controlled, and tissue damage is efficiently repaired. Thus, vitamin D's influence on macrophage polarization plays a pivotal role in both immune defense and the healing process.[14]

Calcitriol modulates this differentiation process primarily through the Vitamin D receptor (VDR), a nuclear receptor expressed in monocytes and macrophages. Upon binding to VDR, calcitriol influences the transcription of specific genes involved in macrophage development. Research by Sadeghi et al. (2006) demonstrated that Vitamin D skews macrophage differentiation toward the M2 phenotype by inhibiting the production of pro-inflammatory molecules such as inducible nitric oxide synthase (iNOS) and TNF-α, which are characteristic of M1 macrophages. Additionally, calcitriol enhances the expression of M2 markers, including CD206 (mannose receptor) and arginase-1, both of which are essential for wound healing and tissue remodeling.[15]

Vitamin D enhances macrophage phagocytic function, a crucial immune mechanism for engulfing and destroying pathogens, dead cells, and debris. This effect is mediated through vitamin D's regulation of antimicrobial peptide production and phagocytic receptor expression. Specifically, calcitriol binding to the vitamin D receptor (VDR) upregulates cathelicidin, an antimicrobial peptide, as demonstrated by Liu et al. (2006), enhancing macrophages' ability to eliminate pathogens like *Mycobacterium tuberculosis.* Vitamin D also increases scavenger receptor expression (e.g., CD36 and SR-A) to aid in the clearance of apoptotic cells and oxidized lipoproteins, which is essential for preventing atherosclerosis. Additionally, vitamin D activates the phosphoinositide 3-kinase (PI3K) pathway, optimizing phagosome formation and pathogen destruction.[16]

These collective effects highlight Vitamin D's essential role in balancing inflammation and immune defense, emphasizing its potential therapeutic value in treating chronic inflammatory and autoimmune diseases. Despite these promising findings, further research is necessary to refine our understanding of how Vitamin D influences macrophage function across varying disease contexts and individual differences, such as age and comorbidities, for effective clinical applications.

DENDRITIC CELSS

Vitamin D plays a crucial role in immune regulation by modulating the proliferation and differentiation of dendritic cells (DCs), which are essential antigen-presenting cells responsible for processing and presenting antigens to T cells, thereby orchestrating the adaptive immune response. However, excessive dendritic cell activity can overstimulate T cells, leading to chronic inflammation and autoimmune disorders. Vitamin D, particularly in its active form, 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D3 (calcitriol), has demonstrated significant immunoregulatory effects by inhibiting these processes.[17]

Research shows that Vitamin D limits the maturation of dendritic cells from monocytes and reduces the expression of MHC class II, CD40, CD80, and CD86, which are essential for naïve T cell activation.[18] By inhibiting full maturation, Vitamin D reduces the capacity of dendritic cells to activate naïve T cells, thereby enhancing immune balance and reducing the risk of excessive immune responses. Vitamin D achieves this through its interaction with the Vitamin D receptor (VDR) on dendritic cell precursors, affecting genes involved in cell cycle control and differentiation, thereby controlling immature dendritic cell proliferation. This effect is particularly valuable in inflammatory conditions where excessive dendritic cell proliferation could worsen the immune response.[19] In addition, Vitamin D's inhibitory effect on dendritic cell differentiation involves suppression of the NF-κB pathway, which is crucial for dendritic cell activation and maturation, further curtailing pro-inflammatory responses.

Recent studies have provided compelling evidence supporting the immunoregulatory effects of vitamin D on dendritic cells (DCs). The active form of vitamin D, 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D_3 (calcitriol), has been shown to promote a tolerogenic phenotype in DCs by impairing their full maturation. Vitamin D-treated DCs exhibit reduced expression of major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class II molecules and co-stimulatory markers such as CD80 and CD86, thereby diminishing their ability to activate naïve T cells and initiate pro-inflammatory responses. Hafkamp et al. (2022) demonstrated that vitamin D_3-primed DCs altered the balance of T cell responses by inhibiting Th17 differentiation and promoting regulatory T cell (Treg) development in a neutrophil-dependent model, indicating a shift toward immune tolerance.[20]

CYTOKINE PRODUCTION: MODULATING IL-12 AND TH1 RESPONSES

Vitamin D plays a pivotal role in modulating cytokine production in dendritic cells, thereby influencing T-cell differentiation and immune responses. IL-12, a critical cytokine for driving T cell differentiation into Th1 cells, facilitates cellular immunity and pro-inflammatory responses. Vitamin D inhibits IL-12 production, leading to a decrease in Th1 differentiation and inflammatory cytokines such as interferon-gamma (IFN-γ), which are implicated in chronic inflammatory diseases like multiple sclerosis and Crohn's disease. Griffin et al. (2001) demonstrated that Vitamin D downregulates the IL-12p40 subunit, an essential component of IL-12, thereby suppressing the inflammatory Th1 response.[21]

Vitamin D also influences antigen presentation by regulating cytokine secretion. Its ability to downregulate IL-12 not only reduces T cell activation and differentiation but also results in a more controlled immune response, highlighting its role in mitigating chronic inflammation. Furthermore, Vitamin D enhances the production of IL-10, a potent anti-inflammatory cytokine that suppresses Th1 cells and promotes immune tolerance. By fostering a balance between IL-12 and IL-10, Vitamin D shifts the immune response toward a Th2 profile, reducing inflammation and supporting immune homeostasis

TABLE 1. MODULATION OF INNATE CELSS BY VITAMIN D[15-22]

Cell	Target	Immunomodulatory Effects of Vitamin D
Macrophages	Differentiation and Maturation	Directs differentiation into either pro-inflammatory (M1) or anti-inflammatory (M2) phenotypes as needed by the immune system.
	Enhanced Phagocytosis	Upregulates antimicrobial peptide production, enhancing phagocytic capability.
	Pro- and Anti-Inflammatory Cytokine Production	Regulates the balance of pro- and anti-inflammatory cytokines to maintain immune system homeostasis.
	Chemokine Modulation in Macrophage Chemotaxis	Influences macrophage migration towards sites of inflammation or infection.
	Impact on Antigen Presentation	Modulates the expression of MHC class II molecules, essential for antigen presentation to T cells.
Dendritic Cells	Proliferation and Differentiation	Inhibits dendritic cell proliferation and differentiation, reducing the risk of immune overstimulation.
	Cytokine Production	Decreases IL-12 production, which plays a role in activating Th1 inflammatory responses, thereby reducing excessive Th1 inflammatory responses.

E. VITAMIN D IN ADAPTIVE IMMUNE RESPONSE REGULATION

Macrophages are essential players in antigen presentation, a process by which pathogen-derived peptides are displayed on cell surfaces to engage T cells, kickstarting an adaptive immune response. Vitamin D has been shown to modulate antigen presentation in ways that shape T cell activation and, consequently, the immune response. A balanced modulation is vital; too much antigen presentation can lead to chronic inflammation and autoimmunity, whereas inadequate presentation may compromise the immune system's ability to fight infections.

Vitamin D achieves this modulation by regulating the expression of major histocompatibility complex (MHC) class II molecules and co-stimulatory molecules on macrophages. MHC class II molecules are critical for presenting antigens to CD4+ T cells, and co-stimulatory molecules like CD80 and CD86 are required for complete T cell activation. For example, Adams et al. (2009) found that calcitriol (the active form of Vitamin D) reduces MHC class II expression on macrophages, which in turn decreases their T cell activation ability. This downregulation helps to manage conditions like autoimmune diseases, where heightened T cell activity can result in tissue damage.[23]

EFFECT ON T CELLS

Vitamin D, particularly in its active form, 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D3 (calcitriol), exerts profound direct and indirect effects on T-cell function and differentiation, playing a pivotal role in immune modulation.[22] One of its primary direct effects is the inhibition of T-cell proliferation, a critical process in adaptive immunity. While T-cell proliferation is necessary for mounting an

immune response, its dysregulation can result in chronic inflammation and autoimmunity. Calcitriol achieves this by binding to the Vitamin D receptor (VDR) on activated T cells, regulating the transcription of cell cycle control genes.

Beyond proliferation control, Vitamin D promotes anti-inflammatory T-cell subsets such as T helper 2 (Th2) cells and regulatory T cells (Tregs), which are vital for maintaining immune tolerance. Th2 cells secrete cytokines like IL-4 and IL-10, which counterbalance pro-inflammatory Th1 and Th17 responses. Tregs further suppress excessive immune activation by enhancing immune tolerance. Research by Daniel et al. (2008) highlighted that Vitamin D facilitates Th2 differentiation through the upregulation of GATA3, a key transcription factor, while promoting Treg expansion by enhancing FoxP3 expression, the master regulator of Treg function. These effects create an anti-inflammatory immune environment, reducing the risk of autoimmune diseases.

Vitamin D also suppresses pro-inflammatory T helper 1 (Th1) cells and their associated cytokines, such as interferon-gamma (IFN-γ) and IL-2, which are implicated in autoimmune diseases like multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis. Calcitriol downregulates T-bet, the transcription factor driving Th1 differentiation, and reduces IFN-γ production, effectively mitigating Th1-driven inflammation. Cantorna et al. (2000) showed that Vitamin D supplementation in deficient mice reduced Th1 responses and alleviated autoimmune symptoms, underscoring its potential in managing Th1-mediated conditions. Similarly, Vitamin D inhibits T helper 17 (Th17) cells, which are associated with IL-17 production and chronic inflammatory diseases such as psoriasis and inflammatory bowel disease. By downregulating RORγt, a critical transcription factor, and suppressing IL-17 production, Vitamin D reduces the inflammatory burden while promoting Treg-mediated immune balance.[23]

In addition to its direct effects on T cells, Vitamin D modulates antigen presentation through its impact on dendritic cells, key players in T-cell activation. By inhibiting dendritic cell maturation, Vitamin D reduces the expression of MHC class II and co-stimulatory molecules, thereby limiting the activation of pro-inflammatory T-cell subsets like Th1 and Th17. Penna et al. (2005) demonstrated that Vitamin D-treated dendritic cells favor Treg differentiation and produce higher levels of IL-10, an anti-inflammatory cytokine that suppresses Th1 and Th17 responses. This dual regulation of dendritic cells and T cells highlights Vitamin D's comprehensive role in maintaining immune homeostasis and preventing chronic inflammation, making it a valuable tool in managing autoimmune and inflammatory diseases.[18]

EFFECT ON B CELLS

B cells, a key component of the adaptive immune system, play a critical role in producing antibodies and presenting antigens. Vitamin D, particularly its active form 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D3 (calcitriol), exerts significant effects on B cell differentiation. The process of B cell differentiation is tightly regulated, as it transitions from an immature state in the bone marrow to fully mature plasma cells that produce immunoglobulins. Vitamin D influences this process by binding to the Vitamin D receptor (VDR), which is expressed on B cells, thereby affecting the transcription of genes involved in B cell maturation.[24]

Research by Chen et al. (2007) demonstrated that calcitriol directly inhibits the differentiation of B cells into plasma cells, which are responsible for secreting antibodies. The study found that Vitamin D reduces the expression of key transcription factors such as B lymphocyte-induced maturation protein-1 (Blimp-1), which is

essential for plasma cell differentiation.[25] By inhibiting this pathway, Vitamin D prevents the excessive production of antibody-secreting plasma cells, which is particularly relevant in autoimmune diseases where B cells often become autoreactive and produce harmful autoantibodies. This ability of Vitamin D to modulate B cell differentiation is crucial for maintaining immune tolerance and preventing overactive immune responses.

Another critical effect of Vitamin D on B cells is its ability to inhibit their proliferation. B cell proliferation is necessary for the expansion of antigen-specific B cells during an immune response. However, excessive proliferation of B cells, particularly autoreactive B cells, can lead to autoimmune diseases such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) and rheumatoid arthritis.[26] Vitamin D, through the activation of VDR on B cells, inhibits their proliferation, thereby controlling the expansion of autoreactive B cells.

Research has shown that calcitriol reduces the production of various classes of immunoglobulins, including IgG, IgM, and IgA. A study by Rolf et al. (2010) demonstrated that Vitamin D directly inhibits the secretion of immunoglobulins from plasma cells by reducing the expression of immunoglobulin genes. This effect is mediated by the downregulation of transcription factors such as Blimp-1, which are required for immunoglobulin production. The study also found that Vitamin D reduces the production of autoantibodies in autoimmune conditions, providing a potential therapeutic mechanism for diseases such as SLE, where B cells play a central role in disease pathogenesis.[24]

The ability of Vitamin D to reduce immunoglobulin production is particularly important in the context of autoimmunity, where uncontrolled B cell activity leads to the production of harmful antibodies. By limiting immunoglobulin synthesis, Vitamin D helps prevent the immune system from attacking the body's own tissues. This immunosuppressive effect of Vitamin D has therapeutic potential in reducing the severity of autoimmune diseases, but it must be carefully balanced to avoid impairing protective immune responses to infections.

Studies have shown that calcitriol reduces the proliferation of B cells by regulating cell cycle progression. Vitamin D inhibits the expression of cyclins, which are proteins required for the progression of B cells from the G1 phase to the S phase of the cell cycle. As a result, B cells are arrested in the G0/G1 phase, preventing their clonal expansion. Chen et al. (2007) also reported that Vitamin D reduces the proliferation of both naïve and memory B cells, highlighting its broad impact on B cell dynamics. By controlling B cell proliferation, Vitamin D limits the pool of B cells that could potentially become autoreactive and produce pathogenic antibodies.[25]

B cell tolerance is also influenced by Vitamin D, which plays a role in preventing B cells from becoming autoreactive and producing autoantibodies. During B cell development, tolerance is established through checkpoints where autoreactive B cells are either deleted or inactivated. In autoimmune diseases, these mechanisms fail, allowing autoreactive B cells to survive and proliferate. Vitamin D, particularly its active form calcitriol, enhances B cell tolerance by promoting the deletion of autoreactive B cells through apoptosis and preventing their activation. Heine et al. (2010) showed that calcitriol upregulates pro-apoptotic genes while downregulating anti-apoptotic genes, selectively eliminating autoreactive B cells, which helps prevent autoimmune disease development. Additionally, Vitamin D promotes B cell anergy, a state of unresponsiveness, where autoreactive B cells cannot activate or produce antibodies.[27]

These findings highlight Vitamin D's potential as a therapeutic tool for restoring B cell tolerance in autoimmune diseases. However, further research is needed to elucidate the precise molecular mechanisms by which Vitamin D regulates B cell tolerance and assess its long-term efficacy in preventing autoimmunity. Understanding the impact of different doses and forms of Vitamin D on B cell tolerance could inform the development of personalized therapies for autoimmune patients, optimizing treatment strategies to maintain immune homeostasis.

Vitamin D's regulatory effects on B cells have significant implications for autoimmune diseases such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), rheumatoid arthritis (RA), and multiple sclerosis (MS), where dysregulated B cells produce pathogenic autoantibodies that cause chronic inflammation and tissue damage. Vitamin D's ability to inhibit B cell proliferation, differentiation, and immunoglobulin production offers a potential therapeutic approach to mitigate these harmful effects. For example, in SLE patients, Vitamin D supplementation has been shown to reduce autoantibodies, such as anti-double-stranded DNA (anti-dsDNA), by inhibiting B cell activity and promoting immune tolerance, as demonstrated in a clinical study by Arnson et al. (2011). These findings suggest that Vitamin D could serve as an adjunct therapy for controlling B cell-mediated autoimmunity. However, further clinical trials are needed to determine optimal dosing, duration, and the long-term safety of Vitamin D supplementation, particularly in patients with autoimmune diseases who may be more vulnerable to infections due to its immunosuppressive effects.[28]

By preventing excessive B cell proliferation and differentiation, Vitamin D supports immune tolerance and curbs overactive immune responses, which is essential in autoimmune treatment. Overall, the immunomodulatory effects of Vitamin D on T and B cells underscore its potential as a therapeutic agent for maintaining immune homeostasis and managing autoimmune diseases.

TABLE 2. MODULATION OF ADAPTIVE IMMUNE CELLS BY VITAMIN D.[23-30]

Cell	Target		Immunomodulatory Effects of Vitamin D
T Cells	Direct effect	Inhibition of T Cell Proliferation	Reduces excessive T cell proliferation to lower the risk of chronic inflammation.
		Promotion of Th2 and Treg Responses	Encourages differentiation of T cells into Th2 and Treg subsets, supporting anti-inflammatory responses and immune tolerance.
		Inhibition of Th1 and Th17 Responses	Suppresses pro-inflammatory Th1 and Th17 activity, which are associated with autoimmune diseases.
	Indirect Effects	Modulation of Antigen Presentation and Dendritic Cells	Inhibits dendritic cell maturation and function, thereby reducing inflammatory T cell activation.
B Cells	B Cell Differentiation		Inhibits differentiation of B cells into plasma cells, reducing the risk of autoantibody production.
	Inhibition of B Cell Proliferation		Limits excessive expansion of B cells, especially autoreactive B cells that can trigger autoimmune diseases.
	Inhibition of Immunoglobulin Production		Suppresses immunoglobulin production, including autoantibodies that may damage body tissues
	Modulation of B Cell Tolerance		Enhances B cell tolerance to self-antigens, helping to prevent autoimmune responses.

Impact on Autoimmune Diseases	Reduces autoantibody production in autoimmune conditions such as systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) and rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

F. THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF VITAMIN D SUPPLEMENTATION FOR INFLAMMATORY DISORDERS

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between vitamin D status and its impact on health outcomes, particularly in the context of acute infections and chronic inflammatory diseases such as abdominal obesity, insulin resistance, type 2 diabetes and hypertension. A growing body of evidence suggests that individuals with lower levels of vitamin D are at increased risk for developing severe acute infections, and they tend to experience poorer clinical outcomes compared to those with adequate vitamin D levels. This has prompted investigations into the potential of vitamin D supplementation as an adjunctive therapy to improve immune function and enhance recovery from infections.[29]

Specifically, vitamin D is known to play a critical role in modulating the immune system, influencing the activity of both innate and adaptive immune responses. By bolstering these immune pathways, vitamin D supplementation could theoretically help patients better combat infectious agents, reduce the severity of symptoms, and expedite recovery. Clinical studies have demonstrated that vitamin D supplementation can significantly enhance immune responses during respiratory infections, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), pulmonary fibrosis even acute lung injury/acute respiratory distress syndrome and COVID-19, where it can potentially reduce the risk of complications and improve survival rates.[30]

In addition to its role in acute infections, vitamin D deficiency is commonly observed in individuals suffering from chronic inflammatory diseases, such as atherosclerosis-related cardiovascular disease, inflammatory bowel disease, chronic kidney disease, and nonalcoholic fatty liver disease. Low vitamin D levels in these conditions may contribute to the pathogenesis of the diseases by influencing various inflammatory pathways. Vitamin D has been shown to affect the expression of cytokines, immune cells, and other key components of the inflammatory response, suggesting that insufficient levels of vitamin D could exacerbate chronic inflammation, thereby promoting disease progression. The connection between vitamin D deficiency and these diseases is multifactorial, with vitamin D potentially affecting not only immune modulation but also vascular health, insulin resistance, and liver function. This pleiotropic role underscores the importance of maintaining sufficient vitamin D levels in managing chronic inflammatory conditions.[31]

Despite the well-established link between vitamin D deficiency and these diseases, the clinical utility of vitamin D supplementation remains a subject of debate. In the broader community, vitamin D deficiency is alarmingly prevalent, with studies indicating that a significant portion of the population—particularly the elderly, individuals with limited sun exposure, and those with certain chronic conditions—has insufficient levels of vitamin D. This deficiency is even more pronounced in critically ill patients, where it has been associated with a range of poor outcomes, including increased mortality, prolonged ICU stays, and higher rates of complications. However, while observational studies have highlighted the association between low vitamin D levels and severe illness requiring ICU admission, there remains no conclusive evidence establishing a causal relationship. In particular,

randomized controlled trials (RCTs) of vitamin D supplementation in critically ill populations have yielded mixed results. Despite initial hopes that vitamin D could improve clinical outcomes in these patients, RCTs have generally failed to show significant benefits. These trials suggest that while vitamin D may play a role in modulating the immune and inflammatory response, its supplementation alone is insufficient to alter the trajectory of critical illness. The lack of consistent findings from clinical trials points to the complexity of vitamin D's role in health and underscores the need for further research to elucidate its precise mechanisms of action and to identify optimal treatment strategies for patients with vitamin D deficiency. The challenge lies in determining the right dosage, timing, and patient selection, particularly in critically ill populations, where the pathophysiology is often multifactorial and complex. Ultimately, more robust evidence is needed to justify routine vitamin D supplementation as a therapeutic approach in critically ill patients.[32]

III. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, Despite the promising research on Vitamin D's effects on various immune cells, significant gaps remain. Many studies focus on specific immune cell subsets in isolation, leaving the broader systemic effects of Vitamin D unclear. Additionally, while animal studies and small human trials suggest positive outcomes, large-scale randomized controlled trials (RCTs) with diverse populations are lacking. Research is also needed to determine the optimal dosing regimens for Vitamin D supplementation, particularly in populations with varying baseline levels of Vitamin D deficiency. Addressing these gaps could significantly advance our understanding of how Vitamin D can be used therapeutically to modulate inflammation in clinical settings.

Vitamin D plays a multifaceted role in modulating immune responses and controlling inflammation through its effects on various immune cells, including macrophages, dendritic cells, T cells, and B cells. While existing studies offer strong evidence of Vitamin D's anti-inflammatory potential, more research is necessary to address the gaps in understanding its long-term effects, optimal dosage, and population-specific responses. By focusing on these areas, future research could provide more definitive guidance on the use of Vitamin D in managing inflammation and autoimmune diseases.

LIMITATION

One of the limitations of this review is that the majority of the included studies are preclinical or observational in nature, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to clinical practice. Additionally, there is considerable heterogeneity in the doses of vitamin D used across studies, and no standardized guidelines currently exist regarding the optimal dosage for managing inflammatory clinical conditions. Therefore, further well-designed clinical trials are necessary to establish effective and evidence-based vitamin D supplementation protocols in the context of inflammation.

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