

Under the Microscope

With Associate Professor Kevin Croft

People with high blood pressure are needed for a study currently under way which investigates the role of vitamin E in heart disease prevention.

Heart disease remains the biggest cause of death in developed countries and over recent years there has been much conjecture about the role of vitamin E in reducing the risk of developing the condition.

There is confusion around reports from clinical trials showing no benefits from pure alpha-tocopherol, a common form of the vitamin found in supplements, and population studies that have reported a benefit from diet-derived vitamin E which contains a mixture of different tocopherols.

The research, based at Royal Perth Hospital, will look at a mixture of tocopherols, rich in gamma-tocopherol, and identify its role in lowering heart disease risk.

Volunteers aged 18 – 75 who have high blood pressure are sought to take part in the six-week study. They will be required to attend a screening session prior to the study and then a series of short visits.

Participants will not have to change their diet, medication or exercise routine during the study.

Associate Professor Kevin Croft and colleagues in the School of Medicine and Pharmacology at Royal Perth Hospital have received a grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council to continue their research into nutritional factors for protection against heart disease.

“We already know that one form of vitamin E, gamma-tocopherol, has potential anti-inflammatory benefits which may be important for people at risk of heart disease,” Associate Professor Kevin Croft said.

“We will be looking at how this form of the vitamin may offer anti-inflammatory protection against heart disease and will aim to build on the argument for mixed dietary antioxidants rather than single supplements.”

Vitamin E is a fat-soluble antioxidant vitamin, antioxidants work to help neutralise the potentially damaging free radicals in our bodies. Vitamin E dissolves in fat rather than water which means that it can be stored for longer in our body.

Foods that are rich in vitamin E include green leafy vegetables, vegetable oils, fortified cereals and nuts.