

New Study Highlights Protective Effects of Zinc

The connection between zinc deficiency and susceptibility to bacterial infection has long been known, but the exact mechanisms by which zinc provides protection remained elusive. That was until Professor Christopher McDevitt of the University of Melbourne led a [research study](#) that uncovered the link between dietary zinc intake and protection against Streptococcus pneumoniae. The study was conducted in collaboration with the University of Queensland and the University of Adelaide in Australia. Insights into the relationship between zinc deficiency and immune system activities were discovered thanks to advanced imaging technology and a cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Streptococcus pneumonia (also known as pneumococcus) is a gram-positive, alpha-hemolytic or beta-hemolytic anaerobic bacteria and the primary bacterium involved in the pathogenesis of pneumonia. Over 1 million deaths per year are caused by pneumonia, particularly in areas where there are social challenges and inadequate access to dietary zinc. This critical research could provide additional nutritional strategies to combat pneumococcal disease.

The study revealed that zinc is used in the body to enhance the killing of invading bacteria. McDevitt and his team showed that animal models with lower zinc intake contracted infection three times faster. The researchers said, "Our work shows that zinc is mobilized to sites of infection where it stresses the invading bacteria and helps specific immune cells kill Streptococcus pneumoniae."

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