

# THE ASSOCIATION OF VITAMIN D STATUS AND THE COMPONENTS OF THE METABOLIC SYNDROME IN PREMENOPAUSAL WOMEN

By

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** Vitamin D deficiency, a widespread problem that is increasing worldwide, has been implicated in a diversity of diseases including metabolic syndrome. The metabolic syndrome is a cluster of risk factors that collectively increases predisposition to major chronic diseases, including diabetes mellitus and cardiovascular diseases.

**Objectives:** The aim of the present study was to determine the vitamin D status in a group of healthy premenopausal Saudi women, and to assess its correlation with the components of the metabolic syndrome.

**Subjects and Methods:** A cross-sectional study of 205 premenopausal Saudi women, aged 20 to 45 years, was carried out in the Center of Excellence for Osteoporosis Research at King Abdulaziz University, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. Blood pressure and anthropometrics were assessed and the body mass index was calculated. Fasting blood samples were collected for measurements of 25-hydroxyvitamin D, fasting blood glucose, triglycerides, and high density lipoprotein-cholesterol. A modified "National Cholesterol Education Program-Adult Treatment Panel criteria" definition was used for the diagnosis of metabolic syndrome.

**Results:** Vitamin D deficiency was extensive, with 92.2% of women having 25-hydroxyvitamin D levels <50 nmol/L. Metabolic syndrome was prevalent in 7.8% of cases. An inverse association was demonstrated between vitamin D levels and all components of metabolic syndrome except high density lipoprotein-cholesterol, which was positively associated with vitamin D levels, although these associations were statistically insignificant. Severely vitamin D-deficient group (<12.5 nmol/L) revealed higher prevalence of metabolic syndrome and all of its components (except elevated blood pressure) when compared to the group of mild to moderate deficiency (12.5-49.99 nmol/L). However, only elevated plasma triglycerides and reduced high density lipoprotein-cholesterol achieved statistical significance.

**Conclusion:** The high prevalence of vitamin D deficiency in apparently healthy premenopausal Saudi women is quite alarming. An inverse association of vitamin D levels with almost all the components of the metabolic syndrome was determined, although statistically insignificant. Significance of such relationship was possibly obscured by the relatively young age of the studied population. Therefore, prospective studies are needed to confirm these findings and to assess vitamin D deficiency as a predictor for the development of metabolic syndrome.

**Key words:** Vitamin D deficiency, Metabolic syndrome, Premenopausal.

## INTRODUCTION

Vitamin D (VitD) has attracted increasing attention due to its multiple extra-skeletal benefits including those for cardiometabolic health (*de la Guía-Galipienso et al., 2021*). VitD deficiency is a widespread problem that is increasing worldwide (*Sarma, 2019*). It has been linked to many adverse health consequences such as cardiovascular diseases, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, cancer, and multiple sclerosis (*Solanki and Gohil, 2014*). According to previous studies, the prevalence of VitD deficiency among Saudi women is very high (*Alzaheb & Al-Amer, 2017* and *AlFaris et al., 2019*).

Metabolic syndrome describes a group of cardiometabolic risk factors including glucose intolerance, abnormal lipid profile, central obesity and hypertension. It has become a global problem and its prevalence is often higher in the urban population of some developing countries (*Saklayen, 2018*).

The association between VitD status and metabolic syndrome was previously investigated (*Ganji et al., 2020*). However, such relationship in young individuals was not fully explored. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to assess VitD status among apparently healthy premenopausal Saudi women, and to correlate this status with

the different components of the metabolic syndrome.

## SUBJECTS AND METHODS

This cross sectional study was carried out in the Center of Excellence for Osteoporosis Research (CEOR) at King Abdulaziz University (KAU). The ethical committee at CEOR approved the study. A total of 205 premenopausal Saudi women living in Jeddah (age range: 20-45 years old) participated in the study.

Women diagnosed with thyroid disorders, chronic renal or liver diseases, diabetes or hypertension were excluded from the study. Those taking any regular medications that affect VitD metabolism (including steroids, antiepileptics, antibiotics, or weight-lowering drugs) were also excluded. A written informed consent was obtained from every participant.

Modified "National Cholesterol Education Program-Adult Treatment Panel (NCEP: ATP III) criteria" (*Grundy et al., 2004*) were used for the diagnosis of metabolic syndrome, details of which have been described previously (*Balkhyoor and Al Kadi, 2014*).

Anthropometric measurements were taken and body mass index (BMI) was calculated. A validated (*Myers, 2006*) BP monitor, Bp TRU (VSM Med Tech Ltd, Coquitlam, Canada), was used for standardized BP measurements while the

subject was sitting. Three readings were recorded after a period of 5 minutes rest, and the mean of the last 2 was used for analysis.

Fasting venous blood samples (10-12 hours of fasting) were obtained from each subject for the determination of different biochemical tests. High density lipoprotein-cholesterol (HDL-C), triglyceride (TG) and fasting blood glucose (FBG) were estimated using "VITROS 250 Clinical Chemistry Auto analyzer" (Ortho-Clinical Diagnostics Inc., Rochester, NY, USA).

25-hydroxyvitamin D [25(OH)D] was quantitatively measured by a direct competitive immunoassay (chemiluminescence) using a LIASON auto analyzer (DiaSorin Inc, Stillwater, MN, USA). The level of 25(OH)D was classified as; desirable VitD level: 100-250 nmol/L, sufficient: 75-99.9 nmol/L, insufficient: 50-74.9 nmol/L, mild VitD deficiency: 25-49.9 nmol/L, moderate deficiency: 12.5-24.9 nmol/L, or severe VitD deficiency <12.5 nmol/L (*Ardawi et al., 2011*). In addition, follicle stimulating

hormone was assayed for confirmation of premenopausal status.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS program version 16, Chicago, IL, USA) was used for data analysis. The sample size was estimated using the Epi-Info statistical package (version 6) [USD, West Park Place, Stone Mountain, GA, USA]. Data were checked for normality using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic. Continuous variables were presented as the Mean±Standard deviation, and categorical variables as frequencies and percentages. Depending on the variable distribution, Pearson's or Spearman's tests were used to study the correlation between different variables. Student's t-test was used to test for significant differences between continuous variables among VitD deficiency groups. Chi-square test was used to examine the association between different categorical variables (VitD status and the presence or absence of metabolic syndrome and any of its components). A p value < 0.05 was considered significant.

## RESULTS

Anthropometric, blood pressure and biochemical characteristics of the study population were presented in **Table (1)**.

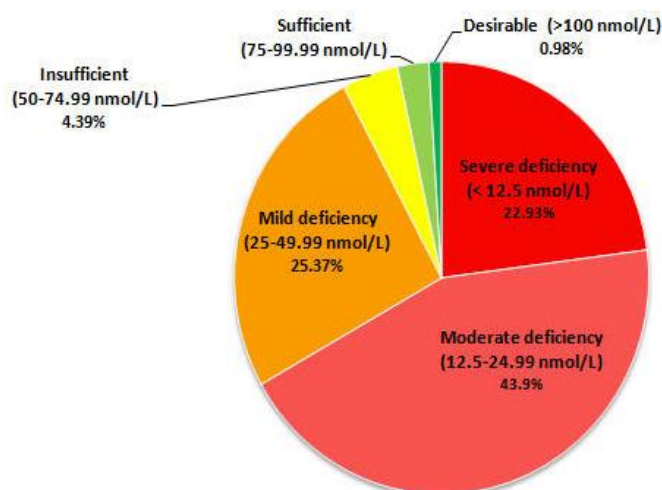
**Table (1): Anthropometric, blood pressure, and biochemical characteristics of the study population**

Variables	Mean ( $\pm$ SD)
Age (years)	32 $\pm$ 8
Weight (kg)	67.7 $\pm$ 15.3
Height (m)	1.58 $\pm$ 0.06
WC (cm)	78.59 $\pm$ 12.33
BMI (kg/m <sup>2</sup> )	27.26 $\pm$ 6.08
SBP (mmHg)	103 $\pm$ 11
DBP (mmHg)	66 $\pm$ 8
TG (mmol/L)	1.02 $\pm$ 0.45
HDL-C (mmol/L)	1.45 $\pm$ 0.37
FBG (mmol/L)	4.63 $\pm$ 1.15
Serum 25(OH)D (nmol/L)	23.62 $\pm$ 17.45

WC, waist circumference; BMI, body mass index; SBP, systolic blood pressure; DBP, diastolic blood pressure; TG, triglyceride; HDL-C, High density lipoprotein-cholesterol; FBG, fasting blood glucose; 25(OH)D, 25- hydroxyvitamin D; SD, standard deviation.

Mean value of VitD in the study population was 23.62 nmol/L  $\pm$  17.45 (**Table 1**). The majority of the study population was VitD-deficient (92.2%) with levels < 50 nmol/L, while 22.93%

had severe VitD deficiency with levels < 12.5 nmol/L. Only 3.4% had sufficient VitD levels  $\geq$  75 nmol/L. Other categories of the VitD status are illustrated in the following graph (**Figure 1**).



**Figure (1): Vitamin D status in the study population**

Sixteen women (7.8%) had metabolic syndrome according to the NCEP: ATP III definition. Since 92.2% of the study population was VitD-deficient (<50 nmol/L), women were stratified into two groups according to the severity of VitD deficiency: severe VitD deficiency (<12.5 nmol/L) and mild to moderate VitD deficiency (12.5-49.99 nmol/L). Severely

VitD-deficient group revealed higher prevalence of metabolic syndrome and all of its components (except elevated BP) as compared to the group of mild to moderate deficiency. However, only elevated plasma TG and reduced HDL-C achieved statistical significance (Table 2 and Figure 2).

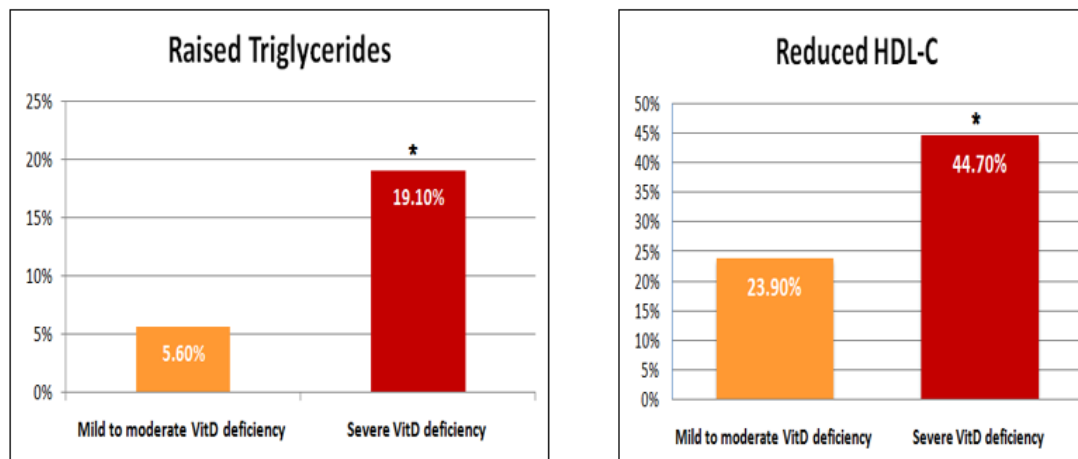
**Table (2): Prevalence of metabolic syndrome and its components among the studied population and according to vitamin D status**

Parameters \ Population	Mild to moderate VitD deficiency (n = 142) n (%)	Severe VitD deficiency (n = 47) n (%)	P value
Metabolic Syndrome	8 (5.6%)	5 (10.6%)	0.240
Central obesity	63 (44.4%)	24 (51.1%)	0.529
Reduced HDL-C	34 (23.9%)	21 (44.7%)	0.007*
Raised TG	8 (5.6%)	9 (19.1%)	0.005*
Impaired FBG	5 (3.5%)	4 (8.5%)	0.164
High BP	5 (3.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0.193

HDL-C, high density lipoprotein-cholesterol; TG, triglyceride; FBG, fasting blood glucose; BP, blood pressure; n, number of women

Mild to moderate VitD deficiency: (12.5-49.99 nmol/L); severe VitD deficiency: <12.5 nmol/L.

\*Significance of difference of severe VitD-deficient compared to mild to moderate VitD-deficient group



Mild to moderate VitD deficiency: (12.5-49.99 nmol/L); severe VitD deficiency: <12.5 nmol/L.

\*Significance of difference of severe VitD-deficient compared to mild to moderate VitD-deficient groups

**Figure (2): Prevalence of raised triglycerides and reduced HDL-C when women were stratified into two groups according to the severity of vitamin D deficiency**

Upon correlating 25(OH) D levels with the components of metabolic syndrome, a negative association was demonstrated with all of its components except HDL-C,

which was positively correlated with 25(OH) D levels (**Table 3**). However, none of these associations reached statistical significance.

**Table (3): Correlation studies between 25(OH) D levels and each component of the metabolic syndrome**

	WC	TG	HDL-C	FBG	SBP	DBP
<b>25(OH)D (r)</b>	-0.092	-0.037	0.045	-0.090	-0.132	-0.075
<b>(P)</b>	0.189	0.598	0.526	0.199	0.060	0.287

25(OH)D, 25-hydroxivitamin D; r, correlation coefficient; P, significant value; WC, waist circumference; TG, triglycerides; HDL-C, high density lipoprotein-cholesterol; FBG, fasting blood glucose; SBP, systolic blood pressure; DBP, diastolic blood pressure.

## DISCUSSION

This study examined the association between vitamin D status and the individual components of metabolic syndrome in a group of healthy premenopausal Saudi women.

A high prevalence of VitD deficiency (92% had 25(OH) D levels < 50 nmol/L) was found among this group. Almost a quarter of these women had severe VitD deficiency (23% had 25(OH)D levels <12.5 nmol/L). Although apparently healthy young women with no known history of any previous medical illnesses were recruited, metabolic syndrome was prevalent among 7.8% of the studied subjects.

The current study supported other Saudi studies (*Alzaheb & Al-Amer, 2017* and *Altowijri et al., 2018*), and confirmed the fact that VitD deficiency is common among young healthy Saudi women. Our results were similar to those reported by *Ardawi and Co-workers (2011)*, involving healthy women (aged 20-79 years old) living in Jeddah. VitD deficiency [25(OH)D levels <50 nmol/L] was found in 80%, and severe VitD deficiency [25(OH)D levels <12.5 nmol/L] in 10.5%

of the studied women. They reported that the high prevalence of VitD deficiency was ascribed to obesity, limited sunlight exposure, inadequate dietary VitD supplementation and old age.

Possible causes of VitD deficiency in Jeddah area include limited exposure to sunlight due to nearly year-round hot weather. Consequently, people avoid direct sun exposure in such a hot climate. In addition, the traditional clothing style covers almost all body parts. Jeddah is one of the largest cities in Saudi Arabia and is undergoing rapid urbanization. As such, air pollution in Jeddah can also contribute to the high prevalence of VitD deficiency; since polluted air reduces ultra-violet B ray penetration, resulting in diminished vitamin D synthesis (*Yang et al., 2021*).

In the current study, in addition to the high prevalence of central obesity among the studied women (46%), the prevalence of obesity (BMI  $\geq$  30 kg/m<sup>2</sup>) was 30.5%, while that of overweight (BMI between 25-29.99 kg/m<sup>2</sup>) was 28% (data not shown in the results section). Waist circumference was negatively correlated with 25(OH)D, and the prevalence of central obesity was greater in women with

severe VitD deficiency, though statistically insignificant.

A recent report (*Hajhashemy et al., 2022*) confirmed that increased waist circumference was linked to a higher risk of VitD deficiency and insufficiency in adults. Therefore, the excessive prevalence of obesity may explain the pervasiveness of VitD deficiency among the studied women.

Many theories have explained the cause of the inverse relationship between increased adiposity, especially abdominal obesity, and low VitD plasma levels. It was reported that 25(OH)D was diluted in greater tissue volume in obese subjects, in line with the volumetric dilution hypothesis (*Drincic et al. 2012*). Other factors include the increased VitD metabolic clearance, with enhancement of its uptake by adipose tissues (*Savastano et al., 2017*), or decreased expression of the principal hepatic VitD 25-hydroxylase enzyme in obesity (*Roizen et al., 2019*). Another theory suggested that the inadequate sunlight exposure among obese subjects, due to the limited outdoor activity and associated osteoarthritis, contributes to VitD deficiency (*Stein et al., 2009*).

In the present study, a negative correlation was observed between 25(OH)D and both systolic and diastolic BP, though statistically insignificant.

Many studies have addressed the association of lower 25(OH)D levels with higher BP readings and higher prevalence of hypertension (*Kunutsor et al., 2013* and *Ke et al., 2015*). It was reported that, in addition to the significant inverse association of baseline 25(OH)D levels with the risk of incident hypertension in

apparently healthy populations, the risk of future hypertension is decreased by 12 % for every 10 ng/mL increase in circulating 25(OH)D levels (*Kunutsor et al., 2013*). An 8-year follow-up study reported that low VitD concentrations were associated with the development of hypertension in healthy middle-aged participants without any chronic illnesses (*Karadeniz et al., 2021*). Therefore, VitD deficiency demonstrated in the current study could be regarded as a potential risk factor for the future development of hypertension in this relatively young group of women.

*He and Hao (2019)* reported the possible mechanisms by which hypertension could be induced with VitD deficiency. Firstly, due to the activation of the renin-angiotensin-aldosterone system, and secondly, due to hyperparathyroidism which is a consequence of VitD deficiency, causing hypertension. The last is due to endothelial dysfunction induced by VitD deficiency, with the resultant reduced nitric oxide synthesis in the blood vessels.

Our study showed a higher prevalence of impaired fasting glucose in the severe VitD-deficient women, as compared to that in the mild to moderate deficiency individuals. In addition, FBG was negatively correlated with 25(OH)D. However, neither finding reached the level of statistical significance.

Vitamin D was reported to be inversely correlated with FBG, and individuals with VitD deficiency (age ranged from 30 to 60 years) showed higher risk for development of type 2 diabetes mellitus when compared to individuals with normal VitD status (*Anwar et al., 2018*). A significant negative correlation was also

demonstrated between 25(OH)D levels and FBG in individuals with type 2 diabetes (age ranged from 36 to 94 years) (*Huu et al., 2021*).

On the other hand, in a study that involved relatively young participants (35-50 years old), no correlation was found between serum 25(OH)D and FBG in both type 2 diabetic patients and healthy individuals (*Islam et al., 2020*).

Moreover, a prospective study showed an inverse association between serum 25(OH)D levels and 10-year risk of developing hyperglycemia, insulin resistance and metabolic syndrome, (*Forouhi et al., 2008*). Such findings might explain the absence of significance in our results, and could point to the possible future development of disturbed glucose homeostasis upon following up these participants.

The proposed mechanisms by which VitD contributes to glucose homeostasis involve modulation of insulin secretion and sensitivity. VitD receptors are expressed by pancreatic  $\beta$  cells, and VitD deficiency can reduce the conversion of pro-insulin into insulin by  $\beta$  cells (*Schmitt et al., 2018*). In an experimental model of non-obese type 2 diabetes, it was reported that VitD deficiency impairs both glucose-stimulated insulin secretion as well as insulin sensitivity. In addition, VitD deficiency decreases  $\beta$ -cell mass by reducing  $\beta$ -cell proliferation (*Park et al., 2016*).

Another noteworthy finding demonstrated in the present study was the significantly higher prevalence of dyslipidemia, in the form of hypertriglyceridemia and reduced HDL-C, in the severe VitD-deficient women as

compared to those with mild to moderate deficiency. Also, it was found that 25(OH)D levels were negatively correlated with TG and positively correlated with HDL-C, though statistically insignificant. The incidence of dyslipidemia in VitD-deficient subjects was reported to be higher than those without VitD deficiency (*Chaudhuri et al., 2013*). Other studies have found similar association between VitD levels and each of TG and HDL-C in the elderly (*Vitezova et al., 2015* and *Liu et al., 2020*). The lack of significance of such associations in our study could be attributed to the recruitment of young, premenopausal participants rather than elderly individuals.

Numerous mechanisms that could explain VitD-mediated reduction of TG levels are suggested. VitD, through its stimulating effect on intestinal calcium absorption, increases plasma calcium levels. Elevated plasma calcium has a suppressive effect on TG microsomal transfer protein, thus decreasing hepatic TG synthesis and secretion (*Cho et al., 2005*). Another mechanism is related to VitD-suppressive action on serum parathyroid hormone (PTH) concentration. Low serum PTH levels can reduce TG levels through enhancing its peripheral removal. It is to be noted that the association between 25(OH)D and TG could also be explained by insulin resistance (*Pittas and Dawson-Hughes, 2010*) which could affect lipoprotein metabolism.

VitD deficiency could be linked to increased risk of coronary artery disease through its contribution in the development of unfavorable lipid profile



(Wang *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, it was reported that plasma HDL-C levels increased after parenteral administration of VitD (Liyanage *et al.*, 2017).

Several studies found a significant inverse association between VitD levels and the incidence of metabolic syndrome (Oosterwerff *et al.*, 2011; Vitezova *et al.*, 2015 and Evrim *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, a meta-analysis reported an association between VitD deficiency and risk of metabolic syndrome in the adult population (Hajhashemy *et al.*, 2021).

### CONCLUSION

The high prevalence of vitamin D deficiency in apparently healthy premenopausal Saudi women is quite alarming. An inverse association of vitamin D levels with almost all the components of the metabolic syndrome was determined, although statistically insignificant. Significance of such relationship was possibly obscured by the relatively young age of the studied population. Therefore, prospective studies are needed to confirm these findings and to assess vitamin D deficiency as a predictor for the development of metabolic syndrome.

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**Conflict of interest:** All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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## الارتباط بين مستوى فيتامين "د" وعناصر متلازمة الأيض في النساء قبل انقطاع الطمث

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**خلفية البحث:** يعتبر نقص فيتامين (د) مشكلة واسعة الانتشار ومتزايدة، وقد تساهم في حدوث العديد من الأمراض بما في ذلك متلازمة الأيض والتي تشمل على مجموعة من عوامل الخطر، مما يزيد من احتمالية الإصابة بالعديد من الأمراض المزمنة، مثل مرض السكري وأمراض القلب والأوعية الدموية.

**هدف البحث:** هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد مستوى فيتامين (د) لدى النساء السعوديات في فترة ما قبل انقطاع الطمث وتقييم ارتباطه بمكونات متلازمة الأيض.

**منهج البحث:** أجريت هذه الدراسة المقطعية في مركز التميز لأبحاث هشاشة العظام، بجامعة الملك عبد العزيز، جدة، المملكة العربية السعودية.

تم اختيار 205 امرأة- تتراوح اعمارهن بين 20 الى 45 سنة- بشكل عشوائي. تم قياس ضغط الدم وقياس الوزن والطول ومحيط الخصر وحساب مؤشر كتلة الجسم. كما تم جمع عينات الدم الصائم لقياس كل من 25-هيدروكسي فيتامين د، جلوكوز الدم الصائم، الدهون الثلاثية، والكوليسترول الحميد. وقد استخدم البرنامج القومي للتنقيف بالكوليسترول - الاجتماع الثالث لعلاج البالغين المعدل- لتشخيص متلازمة الأيض.

**النتائج:** كان نقص فيتامين (د) واسع النطاق، حيث كان لدى 92.2% من النساء مستويات 25-هيدروكسي فيتامين (د) أقل من 50 نانومول / لتر. وكانت متلازمة الأيض منتشرة في 7.8% من الحالات. كذلك اظهر هذا البحث وجود علاقة عكسية بين مستوى فيتامين (د) وجميع عناصر متلازمة الأيض- باستثناء الكوليسترول الحميد والذي ارتبط ايجابيا مع مستوى فيتامين (د)- مع ملاحظة انه لم يكن لأي من هذه العلاقات أي دلالة احصائية.

والجدير بالذكر أن معدل انتشار متلازمة الأيض وعناصرها المختلفة (باستثناء ضغط الدم المرتفع) كان أكبر في السيدات اللاتي يعانين من وجود نقص شديد في مستوى فيتامين (د) (أقل من 12,5 نانومول/لتر) بالمقارنة بالسيدات اللاتي يعانين من نقص بسيط الى متوسط بمستوى هذا الفيتامين (12,5-49,99 نانومول/لتر) وقد كانت هذه العلاقة ذات دلالة إحصائية فقط مع عنصر ارتفاع الدهون الثلاثية وانخفاض الكوليسترول الحميد.

**الاستنتاج:** يعتبر الانتشار الواسع لنقص فيتامين (د) لدى النساء السعوديات في فترة ما قبل انقطاع الطمث أمر مقلق للغاية مما يشير الى وجود حاجة ماسة إلى اتخاذ التدابير اللازمة لتصحيحه.

وقد أكدت هذه الدراسة وجود ارتباط سلبي بين مستويات فيتامين (د) وتقريباً جميع مكونات متلازمة الأيض مع عدم وجود دلالة احصائية لهذا الارتباط، ربما بسبب العمر الصغير نسبياً للسيدات اللاتي تم اجراء الدراسة عليهن.

لذلك فإنه هناك حاجة لإجراء دراسات مستقبلية لتأكيد هذه النتائج وتقييم نقص فيتامين كعامل خطورة قد ينبئ بحدوث متلازمة الايض.

**الكلمات الدالة:** فيتامين (د)، متلازمة الايض، فترة ما قبل انقطاع الطمث.