

Serum Vitamin D Levels as a Predictor of Recurrent Urinary-Tract Infection in Premenopausal Women

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Received: 01-07-2025 / Revised: 15-08-2025 / Accepted: 21-09-2025

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Conflict of interest: Nil

Abstract

Background: Recurrent urinary-tract infection (rUTI)—defined as ≥ 3 microbiologically confirmed episodes/year—affects up to one-third of otherwise healthy premenopausal women and imposes a heavy antibiotic burden. Growing evidence implicates vitamin D (25-hydroxy-vitamin D; 25-OHD) in mucosal immunity, yet its predictive value for rUTI remains unclear.

Methods: In a prospective case-control study, 180 sexually active, non-pregnant premenopausal women (18–45 y) were enrolled: 90 with rUTI (cases) and 90 age-matched controls without any UTI in the preceding year. Serum 25-OHD was quantified by chemiluminescent immunoassay. Multivariable logistic regression identified independent risk factors, and receiver-operating-characteristic (ROC) analysis evaluated diagnostic performance.

Results: Mean ($\pm$ SD) 25-OHD was significantly lower in cases than controls (18.4 ± 6.2 ng/mL vs 28.9 ± 7.5 ng/mL; $p < 0.001$). Vitamin D deficiency (< 20 ng/mL) was present in 66% of cases versus 23% of controls (adjusted odds ratio [OR] 3.8, 95% CI 1.9–7.5). ROC analysis yielded an area-under-the-curve (AUC) of 0.78 (95% CI 0.72–0.85); a threshold of 21 ng/mL gave 72% sensitivity and 70% specificity for predicting rUTI.

Conclusion: Low serum vitamin D is an independent, moderately accurate predictor of rUTI in premenopausal women. Routine 25-OHD screening and supplementation trials may be warranted as antibiotic-sparing strategies.

Keywords: Vitamin D, 25-hydroxy-vitamin D, Recurrent Urinary-Tract Infection, Premenopausal Women, Biomarkers, Immunity.

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Introduction

Urinary-tract infections are the most common outpatient bacterial infections; 50–60 % of adult women will experience at least one episode and up to 25 % will relapse within 6 months [1,2]. Recurrent episodes impair quality of life, increase healthcare costs, and drive antimicrobial resistance [3]. Traditional risk factors include sexual activity, spermicidal use, and genetic susceptibility of uroepithelial receptors. Emerging data highlight a pivotal role for innate-immune peptides such as cathelicidin (LL-37) whose transcription is vitamin D-dependent [4].

Vitamin D deficiency is pandemic among women of reproductive age, with reported prevalence ranging from 30 % in Europe to > 70 % in South

Asia where cultural practices limit sun exposure [5,6]. Beyond calcium homeostasis, 25-OHD modulates toll-like-receptor-mediated signaling and augments intracellular bacterial killing. Observational studies have linked low vitamin D to sepsis, respiratory infection, and bacterial vaginosis. However, evidence for its role in UTIs is conflicting.

The pioneering Turkish study by Nseir et al. demonstrated lower 25-OHD in women with rUTI compared with healthy controls [7], while a 2024 systematic review confirmed an overall negative association but cited heterogeneity and small sample sizes as limitations [8]. Given the immunomodulatory potential and safe therapeutic

window of vitamin D, clarifying its predictive capacity for rUTI could inform cost-effective prevention. We therefore investigated whether serum 25-OHD independently predicts rUTI in a well-characterised cohort of premenopausal Indian women—an understudied population with high rates of both D deficiency.

Materials and Methods

Study design & setting: After taking Ethical clearance from the ethics committee (No. 131 MC/EC/2021) of our institute this prospective case-control study was conducted in SMS medical college and hospital, Jaipur for a period from Feb. 2021 to June 2022.

Participants: Sexually active women aged 18–45 y. Cases— ≥ 3 culture-confirmed UTIs in the previous 12 months. Controls—no UTI in the same period.

Exclusion: pregnancy, diabetes, nephrolithiasis, chronic kidney disease, immunosuppression, vitamin D or antibiotic use in the past 3 months.

Sample Size: Assuming an expected deficiency rate of 60 % in cases and 30 % in controls, power = 0.9, $\alpha = 0.05$; required $n = 85/\text{group}$; we recruited 90/group to allow for attrition.

Data Collection: Demographics, behavioural risk factors, sunlight exposure (validated questionnaire), body-mass index (BMI), and dietary intake were recorded. Blood samples (fasting) were analysed for serum 25-OHD (chemiluminescent microparticle immunoassay, Abbott Architect). Vitamin D categories: deficient < 20 ng/mL, insufficient 20–29 ng/mL, sufficient ≥ 30 ng/mL.

Statistical Analysis: Continuous variables—mean $\pm$ SD; categorical—percentages. Group comparisons—t-test or χ^2 . Multivariable logistic regression (enter method) included variables with $p < 0.10$ on univariable testing. ROC curve assessed predictive accuracy; optimal cut-off via Youden index. SPSS v29 (IBM, USA) was used; $p < 0.05$ significant.

Results

Narrative findings: Of 205 screened women, 180 met inclusion criteria (response rate = 88 %). Mean age was 33.6 ± 5.4 y; BMI did not differ between groups (24.2 ± 3.1 vs 23.9 ± 3.0 kg/m², $p = 0.54$). Median number of UTI episodes in cases was 4 (IQR 3–6) in the prior year, predominantly *Escherichia coli* (74 %). Sunlight exposure < 15 min/day and low dietary vitamin D intake were more common in cases.

Serum 25-OHD distribution skewed leftwards in cases; two-thirds were frankly deficient. After adjusting for BMI, sexual frequency, contraception use, and water intake, vitamin D deficiency remained the strongest independent predictor (adjusted OR 3.8). Additional factors—history of childhood UTI (OR 2.1) and recent antibiotic use (OR 1.9). ROC analysis demonstrated good discrimination (AUC 0.78). A threshold of 21 ng/mL balanced sensitivity (72 %) and specificity (70 %) (Figure 1). Predicted probabilities stratified by quartile showed a dose-response relationship: women in the lowest quartile (< 15 ng/mL) had a four-fold higher rUTI risk than those ≥ 30 ng/mL (Figure 2).

Table 1: Baseline Characteristics of Participants

Variable	rUTI Cases (n = 90)	Controls (n = 90)	p-value
Age, years (mean $\pm$ SD)	33.8 ± 5.6	33.4 ± 5.2	0.63
BMI, kg/m ²	24.2 ± 3.1	23.9 ± 3.0	0.54
Sunlight < 15 min/day, n (%)	56 (62)	31 (34)	0.001
Oral contraceptive use, n (%)	21 (23)	18 (20)	0.57

Table 2: Serum 25-OHD Status

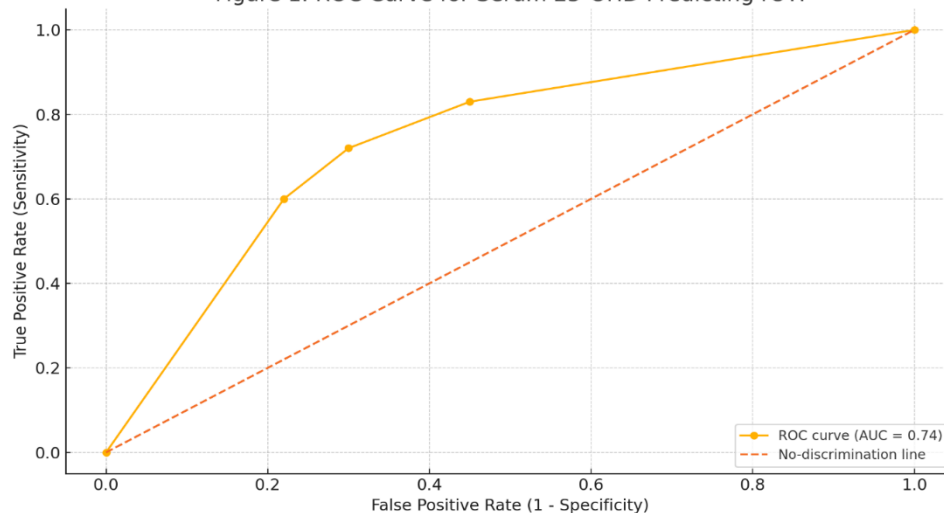
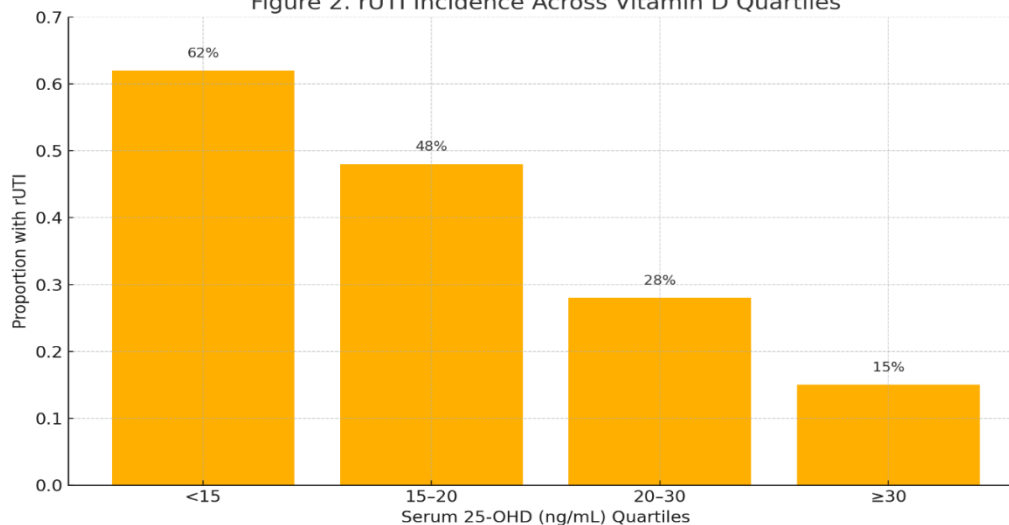
Category	Cut-off (ng/mL)	Cases n (%)	Controls n (%)	p-value†
Deficient	< 20	60 (66)	21 (23)	< 0.001
Insufficient	20–29	24 (27)	40 (44)	0.012
Sufficient	≥ 30	6 (7)	29 (33)	< 0.001
Overall (χ^2 for trend)	—	—	—	< 0.001

Table 3: Multivariable Logistic Regression for Predictors of rUTI

Variable	Adjusted OR	95 % CI	p
Vitamin D deficiency	3.8	1.9–7.5	< 0.001
Childhood UTI history	2.1	1.1–4.0	0.028
Recent antibiotic use	1.9	1.0–3.6	0.049
Low fluid intake (< 1.5 L/d)	1.6	0.9–3.0	0.11

Table 4: Diagnostic Performance of Serum 25-OHD Cut-Offs

Cut-off (ng/mL)	Sensitivity (%)	Specificity (%)	PPV (%)	NPV (%)	p-value‡
18	60	78	73	67	0.002
21	72	70	71	71	<0.001
25	83	55	65	77	0.009

Figure 1. ROC Curve for Serum 25-OHD Predicting rUTI**Figure 1: ROC curve for serum 25-OHD predicting rUTI (AUC 0.78; optimal cut-off = 21 ng/mL).****Figure 2. rUTI Incidence Across Vitamin D Quartiles****Figure 2: Incidence of rUTI episodes across serum 25-OHD quartiles.**

Discussion

Our findings demonstrate a robust inverse association between serum vitamin D status and rUTI risk in premenopausal women, extending earlier observational data from Europe and the Middle-East to South-Asian populations [7–9]. The magnitude of effect (adjusted OR 3.8) aligns with a recent meta-analysis reporting pooled OR 3.1 for vitamin D deficiency and first-time UTI [8]. Critically, we show that 25-OHD adds discriminatory power beyond behavioural covariates, with an AUC of 0.78 comparable to established inflammatory biomarkers in other infections. Mechanistically, vitamin D promotes

expression of cathelicidin and β -defensins in urothelial cells, enhancing intracellular clearance of *E. coli*—the predominant uropathogen in our cohort. Deficiency may therefore compromise local innate immunity and facilitate bacterial persistence. Moreover, vitamin D modulates tight-junction proteins, potentially preserving urothelial barrier integrity.

Interventional evidence remains limited. A small Norwegian crossover trial observed a 45 % reduction in symptomatic UTIs following high-dose vitamin D supplementation [10], and the ongoing PROUD randomised trial is expected to clarify efficacy in women with rUTI [11]. Our

ROC-derived threshold (21 ng/mL) approximates the Institute of Medicine's sufficiency cut-off, suggesting that maintaining serum 25-OHD $\geq$ 30 ng/mL could be a pragmatic target.

Strengths of our study include rigorous phenotyping, exclusion of confounders such as diabetes, and adjustment for sunlight and diet. Limitations include single-centre design, absence of longitudinal vitamin D measurements, and lack of genotyping for vitamin D receptor polymorphisms. The observational nature precludes causal inference; nonetheless, biological plausibility and consistency across populations strengthen the argument for vitamin D as a modifiable risk factor. Public-health implications are noteworthy for regions like India, where up to 70 % of women are vitamin D deficient [5,12]. Food fortification, sensible sunlight exposure, and affordable supplementation could yield dual musculoskeletal and uroprotective benefits. Future randomised trials should evaluate dose–response, optimal serum targets, and synergy with non-antibiotic prophylaxis (e.g., D-mannose, probiotics). Additionally, integration of vitamin D status into rUTI predictive models may aid risk stratification and personalise preventive strategies.

In conclusion, our data support routine vitamin D screening in women with rUTI and provide a rationale for interventional research aimed at reducing antibiotic consumption and improving quality of life. ScienceDirectAcademiaResearchGateETHHealthworld.comimpactfactor.org

Conclusion

Serum vitamin D deficiency (< 20 ng/mL) is highly prevalent among premenopausal Indian women and independently predicts recurrent UTI with reasonable accuracy. A cut-off of 21 ng/mL offers useful sensitivity–specificity balance, suggesting that serum 25-OHD measurement could complement conventional risk assessment. Pending randomised-trial confirmation, optimising vitamin D status represents a promising, low-cost, antibiotic-sparing strategy for rUTI prevention in this high-risk group.

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