Autoimmune Diseases have a Strong Genetic Basis, such as HLAB27 in Ankylosing Spondylitis

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Commentary

Autoimmune diseases have a strong genetic basis, such as HLAB27 in Ankylosing Spondylitis [1]. The role of environment is less clear. A retrospective study among US Veterans did not identify any specific environment that was associated with auto-immune diseases, except for auto-immune thyroiditis among Persian Gulf War veterans.

The study was limited by patient numbers and retrospective design since many variables could not be controlled [2]. A prospective longitudinal study would address the deficiencies of the retrospective study. Such a study would ideally be in serving or retired US defence personnel as they have the best cross section of variables that can be controlled.

Such a study would examine a large number of personnel over 5 or 10 years and control for race, diet (including vegetarians, smokers, and those who consume alcohol), and part of the world they were deployed to. Thus, analysis could be done on Caucasian males who are non-vegetarians versus those who are vegetarians.

Further analysis could be done on those who were stationed abroad versus those who stayed in the US [3]. Another analysis would look at racial differences, controlling for other variables. Given appropriate participant numbers, many different kind of analysis could be done to better elucidate the role of environment in auto-immune diseases.

References