

The Down-Low on D

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Now that we are in the heart of the fall season and soon entering winter, it's the perfect time to talk about Vitamin D. Most people know a little something about Vitamin D, but despite all the press it's been getting in recent years, there are still a lot of misconceptions about this nutrient.

What is Vitamin D?

Vitamin D is an essential fat-soluble nutrient. Although it's called a vitamin, dietary D is actually a precursor hormone, the building block of a powerful steroid hormone called calcitriol. Although there are five forms of D, D2 (ergocalciferol, synthesized by plants) and D3 (cholecalciferol, synthesized in skin with ultraviolet ray exposure) are the most important for humans.

Just do a quick Google search on Vitamin D and you'll find pages and pages of articles listing its many benefits. Our bodies' immune, nervous and cardiovascular systems require it for healthy function. It also helps reduce the risk of serious illnesses such as breast cancer and osteoporosis and aids in weight loss and strong teeth and bones. But despite Vitamin D's many benefits, approximately 85 percent of Americans are deficient!

The latest research cites D deficiency as a major factor in the pathology of at least 17 types of cancer as well as heart disease, stroke, hypertension, autoimmune diseases, diabetes, depression, chronic pain, osteoarthritis, osteoporosis, muscle weakness, birth defects, periodontal disease, and more.

How do we get Vitamin D?

There's no need to stay in the sun for long periods of time to meet your body's daily Vitamin D needs. Just 20 minutes a day will be sufficient, but the trick is do get outside when the sun is directly over head, or when your shadow is shorter than your body. You'll get the most exposure between the hours of 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. Don't shower off or apply lotions and makeup after sitting outside, but rather give your skin some time to absorb the Vitamin D into your system.

According to a recent article in Alternative Medicine Review, the economic burden of D deficiency in the U.S. is between 40 and 53 billion dollars per year!

If cold and gloomy weather, a hectic schedule or that darn job or yours prevent you from sunbathing for 20 minutes each day, you may need to find another means to get your daily dose of Vitamin D. Although you can find Vitamin D fortified milk products, the negative impacts of getting too much dairy far outweigh the positives of receiving the vitamin in this form. Oftentimes foods that are fortified with D are also processed, and it's best to steer clear!

You'd have to drink approximately 200 glasses of milk to get the same amount of Vitamin D you receive with just 20 minutes in the sun!

So your best bet is to take a Vitamin D supplement. As a general rule, an adult of average weight should ingest about 4,000 to 5,000 international units of supplemental D3 a day, and children should take a daily dose of 1,000 international units per every 25 pounds of body weight. This varies depending on the season, where you live, your age, skin tone, etc.

As the days get shorter, it's important that we bump up our Vitamin D intake, so consider getting on a good supplement. Feel free to contact us for suggestions from our nutrition shoppe. We also have a Vitamin D sun bed in our office.

What foods should we eat to boost my Vitamin D levels?

Oily fish is the primary food source of Vitamin D. A filet of salmon contains about 360 IU of D. The trouble with fish is that eating too much fish can lead to mercury poisoning. An egg contains about 20 IU. Cod-liver oil is a very rich source of D3, containing about 1,360 IU in just a tablespoon. Although these foods are helpful, they don't contain sufficient amounts of D to get us our 5,000 IU without sun exposure or a supplement!

Since D is a fat-soluble vitamin, it's imperative that we maintain a healthy balance of fatty acids. In other words, there is no point in trying to boost your D levels while you're on a fat-free diet, because we need plenty of good fats to absorb it. The same goes with magnesium, you gotta have one to have the other, and that's why many Vitamin D supplements are a magnesium/D combo.

Take measures to maintain good Vitamin D levels this fall/winter season, and enjoy better health for years to come.