

Vitamin D do's and don'ts

You've seen it for years on your milk cartons: "Vitamin D fortified". As familiar as vitamin D may be, there has recently been a renewed interest in this hormone-like vitamin.

Vitamin D's primary functions in the body relate to calcium absorption and bone mineralization. As such, deficiency of vitamin D leads to rickets in children and osteomalacia in adults, both bone-softening disorders.

However, newer findings show that vitamin D plays a beneficial role in not only bone-related conditions but also in high blood pressure, autoimmune conditions, some pain syndromes, and even cancer.

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin, meaning it is best absorbed when taken along with foods containing at least some fat, and will be stored by your body. But vitamin D is different from other vitamins in that our body will actually make this critical nutrient when sunlight (specifically UV-B rays) strikes our skin. We can also get vitamin D from selected food sources, the most common of which is milk fortified with vitamin D. Other dairy products, such as cheese and yogurt, are not necessarily good sources, as the milk from which they are made may not have had vitamin D added. Cod liver oil and fatty fish, like salmon and mackerel, are also high in vitamin D. There is also vitamin D fortified orange juice available.

So how much vitamin D should you be getting? While the RDA is set at somewhere

between 200-800 IU per day, the true answer is we're not exactly sure at this point! Newer data is suggesting that we may need more than previously thought.

There are several key factors in determining vitamin D need, the major one being the amount of sunlight to which you are exposed throughout the year. In our climate, exposure to sunlight drops significantly during winter months, resulting in the production of less vitamin D. However, during summer months, we tend to get much more sun and thus more vitamin D. One vitamin D expert has estimated that a light-skinned person in a swimsuit in full sunlight absorbs 20,000 IU vitamin D in the time it takes for skin to get lightly pink.

Obviously, dietary intake and supplementation of vitamin D are important considerations as well.

But there are also some factors that may interfere with your vitamin D status. Elderly folks tend not to absorb vitamin D as well as they did when they were young, and their skin loses efficiency in producing vitamin D in the presence of sunlight. People with darker skin color do not create as much vitamin D when sunlight strikes their skin. For some, medical conditions such as some kidney and liver disorders interfere with vitamin D metabolism. Patients with tuberculosis or lymphoma, as well as those with a condition called sarcoidosis, should not take supplemental vitamin D, as this may worsen their condition.

If you are breastfeeding, you

should ask your pediatrician about supplemental vitamin D for your baby, as breast milk does not contain much vitamin D. (Infant formula is usually fortified with vitamin D.)

For those with a history of skin cancer, you have likely been urged by your dermatologist to avoid sunlight. As such, your vitamin D stores may be lower than optimal.

Sunblock with an SPF of 8 or more completely blocks vitamin D production in the skin. Also bear in mind that glass filters out most UV-B rays, so sunlight through a window doesn't count toward vitamin D production!

The only true way to really know whether your vitamin D supply is adequate is through periodic blood tests. There are several vitamin D lab tests available; however the recommended study is called the "25(OH)D" test. Ask your doctor to avoid ordering the "1,25(OH)D" study, as it is not accurate for these purposes. Once you have established your current vitamin D levels, you can more reliably and safely address your need for supplemental vitamin D.

An important point to bear in mind: since vitamin D is stored in your body, it is indeed possible to accumulate too much and become toxic! Vitamin D toxicity is a potentially serious problem. Therefore, never load up on high-dose vitamin D supplements without professional guidance.

As noted earlier, there have been several exciting new studies suggesting a role for vitamin D in

several common diseases. Research published in a recent issue of *Neurology* concluded that women with higher levels of vitamin D intake (above 400 IU) had a 40 percent reduced risk of developing multiple sclerosis (MS), an autoimmune disease. There is data relating to other autoimmune diseases, such as rheumatoid arthritis and Type I diabetes, which suggests a beneficial role for vitamin D. Patients with some pain syndromes have benefited from vitamin D. There is also some thought that vitamin D deficiency can contribute to fibromyalgia.

Research has shown an association between inadequate vitamin D levels and cancer of the prostate, colon, and breast. As this research is currently limited and still needs clarification, we will need to stay tuned for future updates.

Unfortunately, there is also evidence that adolescents are not exempt from inadequate vitamin D levels. Studies have shown vitamin D deficiencies in this age group. It has been suggested that any child not drinking 17 ounces of fortified milk per day is probably coming up short on vitamin D; and this is especially true for kids getting limited sun exposure. Kids eating lots of junk food are also particularly vulnerable.

So, what's the bottom line with vitamin D? First, try to get about 10 minutes of mid-day sun on your face, hands and forearms on most days (unless you have been specifically advised against this for medical reasons). This

DR. PROODIAN'S HEALTH CORNER



By: Dr. James Proodian

alone should satisfy much of your vitamin D requirements. However, since this sun exposure is not always possible, try to include dietary sources, such as fortified milk, orange juice, and oily fish. Regarding vitamin supplements, your combined vitamin D intake should be around 400-800 IU per day. Just remember — it is possible to overdose on vitamin D from supplements, so watch those higher doses. And, should you wish to more accurately determine your vitamin D needs, have your blood tested for "25(OH)D" and adjust from there.

Note that anyone with tuberculosis or lymphoma, as well as those with a condition called sarcoidosis, should not take supplemental vitamin D, as this may worsen their condition.

■
Dr. James Proodian is an author, educator, and healthcare practitioner specializing in Chiropractic Rehabilitation and other natural healing techniques. He also provides free health lectures and health screenings for companies, clubs, schools, churches, and other organizations in the local area. Dr. Proodian can be reached at his practice, Natural Healthcare Center of West End, at 732-222-2219.