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Vitamin D, cancer, and the flu

As usual, this year has seen an explosion of new nutritional research and information. Perhaps none has been as intriguing as the continued adventures of vitamin D. Not long ago, it was believed that vitamin D's only role was to help our dietary calcium get absorbed, which is obviously important for our bones. Over the last few years, however, more and more emerging data has identified the role of vitamin D in other key areas.

One of these areas is cancer. There is now growing agreement that vitamin D may play a critical role in cancer prevention. Recent studies published in major medical journals have helped clarify that having higher blood levels of vitamin D does appear to be protective against several forms of cancer, including prostate, colon, breast, ovarian and pancreatic. Is

it a cure for cancer? Of course not. But it is an easily modifiable factor toward better health.

Just released was another intriguing study, written by several of the world's vitamin D experts, that considers whether vitamin D deficiency can render one more vulnerable to the flu. What can vitamin D have to do with the flu, you might ask? As we know, the flu season runs its course over the winter months. Also occurring during the winter months is a reduction in sun exposure, particularly the type of sun exposure that causes our bodies to manufacture vitamin D. Consequently, it is during the winter that vitamin D levels drop off most. The authors of the above hypothesis believe falling vitamin D levels and rising numbers of flu cases may not be a coincidence. Should such a link

be definitively solidified, the public health impact would be huge.

Unfortunately, however, it turns out that many of us are deficient in vitamin D. This goes for people of all ages. At particularly high risk are those with darker skin color (e.g., African-Americans), as well as the elderly. Obesity also apparently predisposes one to low blood levels of vitamin D, and we are all painfully aware of the rising rates of overweight-ness and obesity.

If you consciously avoid the sun because you have skin cancer or because of a medication you may take, then there is a good chance you are not producing adequate amounts of vitamin D. This is also true for nursing home patients who tend to get very little sun exposure.

Should you fall into a high-risk

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group, it's not a bad idea to have your blood tested for vitamin D levels (the correct blood test is the "25-hydroxy-vitamin D" test). For most everyone else, taking 1000 IU (International Units, which is how vitamin D is measured) a day of vitamin D in the form of supplements is recommended, particularly over the winter months. Look for supplements in the form of "vitamin D3" or "cholecalciferol," as this is the best form of vitamin D to take. Vitamin D2, also called "ergocalciferol," is an inferior source of vitamin D and will not have the same level of effectiveness.

Research into vitamin D is still

evolving. And although we don't fully understand everything about the "sunshine vitamin," further study is on the way. I, for one, will be staying tuned. For more information on Vitamin D, please visit my website and read "Vitamin D Do's and Don'ts."



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 throughout Monmouth County. To have him speak at your company, school, or organization, contact the Natural Healthcare Center at 732-222-2219.

Dr. Proodian's other health articles can also be found at www.NaturalHealthcare-Center.com.