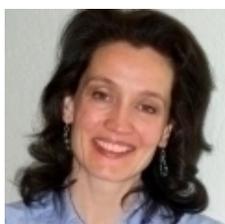


Vitamin D important, but a little goes a long way

By Mandy Kendall

When I was growing up, whenever the sun appeared (which wasn't always that often in England) I remember my mother telling us to go outside in the sunshine to help us grow big and strong. At the time I figured it was just to get us out of the house and from under her feet, but it turns out she was actually making sure that we grew up big and strong (well, that and she probably really did want us out of the house).

Sunshine is fundamentally important for all kinds of reasons. It is a great natural antiseptic as the ultraviolet light in its rays can kill viruses, bacteria and molds in air, water and on our skin. Sunshine can boost your digestion and metabolism and increase your white and red blood cell count. Sunlight can improve your mood by increasing your serotonin (the happy hormone) levels and also increase the production of melatonin, a hormone that helps you sleep. Sunlight can also improve the function of your liver breaking down toxins in the body. Arthritic joints may also benefit from the healing powers of the sun's rays.



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However one of the most important effects of sunshine for us is the production of vitamin D. The benefits of Vitamin D are numerous but here are a few key ones:

- Helps regulate calcium and phosphorus levels in your blood
- Promotes calcium absorption in your small intestine
- Improves your immune system
- Plays a major role in the life cycle of your cells
- Recent studies show that certain cancers and immune dysfunction are strongly associated with vitamin D deficiency.

How much do we need daily?

The Nutrition Board of the National Academy of Sciences set a standard in 1997 of 200 to 600 International units (IU) per day depending on your age. It is now generally agreed that 1,000 to 2,000 IU per day from a variety of sources (sun, diet and supplements) is closer to what we need for optimum health

So how do we get vitamin D?

The sun is the best source. When exposed to sunlight your body is able to produce this fat soluble vitamin naturally. Your skin uses ultraviolet rays to make the vitamin which is then rapidly absorbed in the blood and fat tissue and can be stored for several months.

How much sunshine is enough?

A Harvard Public Health Review suggests: "A light-skinned person who takes walks in the summer with the face, neck, and arms exposed for 15 minutes gets enough." The review goes on to say that darker skin needs up to twice as much exposure to generate the same amount of vitamin D and also warns about the dangers of prolonged exposure without sunscreen. Evidence suggests that supplementation may be needed during the months when there is less sunshine.

What are other good sources?

It's hard to get vitamin D from diet which is why some foods

are fortified with vitamin D. The same Harvard Review reported however that although a glass of milk is “supposed to contain about 100 IU ... in reality may contain as little as 50 IU on average.”

Fatty fish is considered the best source of vitamin D with a 3.5 ounce serving of cooked salmon providing around 360 IU. Three ounces of canned tuna will have about 200 IU and a 13.4-ounce can of sardines provides approximately 250 IU.

As many of us spend a lot of time indoors, and don't eat a fatty fish rich diet, supplementation is recommended to fill the gaps. General guidelines suggest no more than 2,000 IU per day using products containing vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol), which is reported to be three to four times more potent than vitamin D2 (ergocalciferol).

Until next time.

Mandy Kendall operates Health Connective in South Lake Tahoe, which aligns wellness seekers with their ideal wellness provider. If you have questions, would like some advice, or would like to request some Qwik-e tips on any health and well-being topic, drop her an email at connect@healthconnective.com or keep an eye out on Lake Tahoe News for regular Qwik-e tips on how to make healthy changes one Quick and Easy step at a time.