

SUN & SKIN

Sun Protection and Vitamin D

We all need vitamin D. It spurs bone growth. Without it, we'd be at high risk of conditions such as osteoporosis. Vitamin D also gives an important boost to the immune system. Some in the medical community believe it can help stave off any number of diseases. A D deficiency can open a Pandora's box of ailments.

When your skin is exposed to sunlight, it manufactures vitamin D. The sun's ultraviolet B (UVB) rays interact with a protein called 7-DHC in the skin, converting it into vitamin D3, the active form of vitamin D.

The problem is, too many people think that using sunscreen and other forms of sun protection leads to vitamin D deficiency, and that the best way to obtain enough of the vitamin is through unprotected sun exposure. This can lead to a whole other set of serious problems.

BENEFITS OF VITAMIN D, RISKS OF D DEFICIENCY

Vitamin D helps keep your bones strong by regulating calcium levels. Maintaining adequate amounts of the vitamin is essential for your bone health. People deficient in the vitamin can suffer symptoms including—

- Muscle aches
- Muscle weakness and bone pain
- Slower growth, bone softening
- Increased risk of deformities, osteoporosis and fractures

BENEFITS OF SUN PROTECTION, RISKS OF SUN EXPOSURE

There is overwhelming evidence for the multiple benefits of sun protection. Controlled studies have shown that regular use of an SPF 15 or higher broad-spectrum sunscreen reduces your chances of developing squamous cell carcinoma by about 40 percent, melanoma by 50 percent and premature skin aging by 24 percent. It has been proven on the molecular

level that the sun's ultraviolet (UV) light damages the skin's cellular DNA, creating genetic mutations that can lead to skin cancer. Both the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the World Health Organization have identified solar UV as a proven human carcinogen, with studies linking it to about 90 percent of nonmelanoma skin cancers and about 86 percent of melanomas, as well as premature skin aging. In addition, UV radiation harms the eyes and can cause cataracts, eyelid cancers and other ocular skin cancers, including melanomas.

You need sun protection as much as you need vitamin D. You can have both, without skin damage or nutritional deficiency.

WHAT IS A HEALTHY LEVEL OF VITAMIN D?

If you're having blood drawn for your annual checkup, ask your doctor to test your vitamin D level. On your lab report, here's what your number means.

BELOW 30—Deficient. Talk to your doctor about supplements.

30 to 50—Generally inadequate for bone and overall health.

50 & ABOVE—Adequate (more is not necessarily better)

125 & ABOVE—Too high (may have adverse effects)

BETTER CHOICES

The question is, if not from UV exposure, how can you obtain enough vitamin D?

It's pretty straightforward, actually. You can acquire vitamin D from a combination of diet and supplements.

- Fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel and tuna
- Egg yolks, beef liver and cheese
- Milk and orange juice are fortified with vitamin D

(Read labels, because foods are fortified only when they say they are.)

You can mix and match these foods to get the daily allowance of 600 International Units (IU) recommended by the Institute of Medicine and The Skin Cancer Foundation for the average person between the ages of 1 and 70.

The bottom line: Food, supplements and incidental, protected sun exposure will give you all the D you need, without subjecting yourself to the multiple risks of unprotected sun exposure.

Source: skincancer.org



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