



Vitamin D is Essential to Health and Well Being and Here's Why

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Vitamin D: A supplement most folks need

If you live in a cold climate, most likely you need to supplement Vitamin D in winter. Two main ways to get vitamin D are by exposing your skin to sunlight and by taking vitamin D supplements. You can't easily get enough vitamin D from food, as foods containing it have only small amounts, and our bodies are best programmed to get D from the sun.

In summer months, even in Boston, sun exposure will do the trick. How much you need depends on how naturally dark your skin is- how much melanin (skin pigment) it has. Lighter-skinned folks will get their vitamin D more quickly, while those with darker skin will take longer to absorb it. But there is no way you're going to get what you need anywhere way north of the equator in the winter.

How We Become Deficient

As I can personally attest, we are meant to be tropical creatures, (I live for the summer months) but some of us live in very un-tropical places. The farther away you live from the equator the more you need vitamin D. Even if you were to lie out in the sun for a long period of time during the colder months, the angle of the sun wouldn't allow you to get the vitamin D you need.

But it isn't only the latitude you live in that makes it hard to get vitamin D. If you live in areas with pollution or prolonged cloud cover, or in a city where the sun is blocked by buildings, or if you spend a lot of time working indoors, you are not getting the vitamin D you need from the sun.

Vitamin D deficiency can be hard to diagnose. You really don't feel it if your bones are getting weaker. Some symptoms can be difficult to discern from other things. Symptoms include muscle weakness, tiredness, bone and muscle pain. Sounds a lot like the flu... I suggest that when you go for your annual physical, have your doctor run a vitamin D level. If your vitamin D deficiency is severe, your doctor might suggest a large prescription dose to get you back on track. Then you can transition to an over-the-counter supplement. You should also check with your doctor about taking supplemental vitamin D as there are a few medical conditions that contraindicate it.

Why We Need Vitamin D

Vitamin D regulates calcium and phosphorus absorption; we need both these minerals in order to function well and to keep our bones and immune system healthy. Kids need it for proper bone growth, and elders for fighting osteoporosis. It can help fight flu and other

seasonal illnesses. A very interesting effect of vitamin D is that it aids in reducing depression and anxiety. It is especially helpful with seasonal depression, but appears to help generalized depression also. D helps your heart to function normally and may help prevent heart attacks and strokes. All that would be enough, but it even boosts weight loss in overweight individuals.

How much D should we take?

I've talked to a lot of doctors and naturopaths about supplemental dosage of vitamin D. I get a lot of different answers. The central question around supplementation is really how much can your body absorb. If you take an enormous quantity of D over the counter, are you really absorbing that amount into your body? The consensus seems to be that 2000 iu is a good amount to take on a daily basis. There is also controversy about take taking it year-round or only in the colder months. Again, I tend to go with the consensus: I start taking my D in September and take it through the end of April. I am a very happy "sun person" and try to get out as much as possible as soon as possible (mindfully using sunscreen when needed, of course). You should adjust your decision based on how much you get out and actually sit in the sun. You might just decide to take it year-round to be sure.

Pretty much any of the vitamin D3 supplements are fine (D3 is recommended because it's natural- the type we make from the sun). It doesn't matter if you take it as a liquid, capsule, or pill. Be cautious if you want to use cod liver oil, though, as it has a lot of vitamin A, which may be too much for your body. I prefer taking vitamin D as a separate supplement.

There are some foods that do provide vitamin D: salmon, sardines, egg yolks and shrimp, for example. But again, remember it is unlikely that you can get what you need from food.

I know that that some people feel they are taking too many pills and supplements every day but in the case of vitamin D this really is a necessary health support, especially during the winter months. So let it snow, let it snow, let it snow- and remember to take your D.

Namaste,
Wendy