

Shedding Light on Vitamin D

While increasing use of sun protection in Australia has helped reduce the incidence of skin cancer, paradoxically our rate of susceptibility to other diseases has increased because of reduced sun exposure. Vitamin D deficiency is one example of the negative effects of reduced sun exposure.

Role of Vitamin D in your body:

- Historically used for the prevention of Rickets in adults;
- Helps calcium metabolism to keep bones strong; and
- Helps with a range of other functions including blood sugar levels, moderating the immune system, and the prevention of Inflammatory Bowel Disease (IBD).

Without a blood test, it's difficult to identify if you have a Vitamin D deficiency; however, as a guide most people need approximately one to two hours of exposure to sunlight each week to be able to produce enough Vitamin D to be healthy. High risk groups include the elderly (especially those in residential care), dark skinned populations, women who practice veiling, vegetarians and those with a malabsorption syndrome. Recent reports have suggested that up to one third of men & women in Victoria, NSW, South-East Queensland and Western Australia have a mild to moderate Vitamin D deficiency. Australians in the Southern parts of Australia have a higher risk of Vitamin D deficiency, especially during the Winter months.

Sources of Vitamin D for your body include:

- Synthesis through exposure to sunlight;
- Diet from sources such as oily fish & mushrooms (important for vegetarians);
- Sources fortified in some milk products & margarine;
- Oral supplements including Vitamin D tablets, Fish Oil, Cod Liver Oil or Halibut Liver Oil.



Major deficiencies in Vitamin D require injections. Generally, enough Vitamin D can be sourced with an average of 15 to 20 minutes per day exposure to direct sunlight. Use of sunscreen protection reduces the amount of exposure and their use should be avoided for these short exposure periods. People with dark skin need longer exposure times for their bodies to synthesise Vitamin D. Otherwise, an oral supplement (200 to 400 IU per day of Vitamin D2 or as advised by your health practitioner) is the safest & easiest way to correct a deficiency in Vitamin D.

Note: excessive exposure to direct sunlight is linked to skin cancer and skin damage. Therefore health advice to apply sunscreen, to cover up and to wear a hat when in the sun for longer periods of time, as well as avoiding the sun during the high Ultra Violet (UV) exposure periods of 11am to 4pm during Summer, are still recommended.

For more information consult with your healthcare practitioner.

Reference: "The Vitamin D Paradox", *Nutrition Care Bulletin*, Volume 15, Issue 2 2007 - <http://www.nutritioncare.com.au>

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