

# Safe Sun Exposure For Optimal Vitamin D Levels

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## Introduction

As sunny weather has recently arrived in the lower mainland after another long grey winter, it is an appropriate time to discuss the relationship between sun exposure and vitamin D. This topic is especially timely for me as I just returned from a conference in Tucson, Arizona where sunlight was abundant and the world's top vitamin D expert Michael Holick, MD PhD was presented with the 2007 Linus Pauling Award for outstanding research in nutritional medicine. I had the unexpected pleasure of hearing Dr. Holick present his latest research on the connection between vitamin D deficiency and the higher incidence of many different diseases (as discussed in Vitamin D Update in the August 2006 Choices newsletter) and his recommendations for optimizing vitamin D levels through safe sun exposure.

## Increasing Vitamin D Levels

The two options to significantly increase the body's vitamin D stores are sunlight (ultraviolet-B) exposure and vitamin D supplementation. Food sources are not of sufficient concentration to optimize levels of D in the body. Supplementation can be reserved for the winter when little or no ultraviolet-B is available at our latitude and climate. During the summer, sunlight exposure is the best choice for most people as it is safe, natural and free.

## Get Safe Sun Exposure...While It's Available

From Dr. Holick's research at Boston University, he has created Safe Sun Tables to help us carefully attain optimal vitamin D levels through brief sun exposure without sunscreen. The tables use skin type, latitude, time of year and time of day to calculate the duration of sun exposure required. For example, a Vancouver resident (living at 49 degrees latitude) with mod-




erate skin tone (Type 3 out of 6) would require 15 minutes of nearly full-body sun exposure around noon during midsummer, two to three times per week. Safe Sun Tables are available at the end of Dr. Holick's excellent book *The UV Advantage*. Any excess vitamin D created through sunlight exposure is broken down and consumed by the body. One's body will never create too much vitamin D from sunlight exposure. The only way to overdose on vitamin D is through excessive supplementation.

## Warning: Avoid Sunburn!

Although short duration sunlight exposure without sunscreen is an effective and natural way to increase the body's Vitamin D stores, it is important to achieve this without becoming sunburned. Repeated sunburn is clearly linked to an increased incidence of skin cancer and should be avoided!

## Conclusion

Now that summer is around the corner, Lower Mainland residents should take advantage of their brief opportunity to optimize vitamin D levels naturally through safe sun exposure and decrease their risk of many diseases in the process. 

## References:

Holick, Micheal MD PhD *The UV Advantage*. IBooks, New York, 2003.  
Zittermann, A. Vitamin D in Preventive Medicine: Are We Ignoring The Evidence? *B J Nutr.* 2003 May;89(5):552-72.



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