

Preparing For Vitamin D Season: Get Your Safe Sun Exposure While You Can

By Dr. Arjuna Veeravagu ND RAc

The amount of scientific research confirming the magnitude of Vitamin D deficiency in North America and its resulting health consequences continues to grow very rapidly. With the number of serious conditions now clearly linked to this vitamin, D deficiency may be reaching epidemic levels. The most natural way to increase Vitamin D levels in the body is by safely exposing our skin to sunlight whenever we can.



ate 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. Our bodies will never produce an unhealthy amount of 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, as Lower Mainland residents we should take advantage of our brief opportunity to optimize Vitamin D levels naturally through safe sun exposure and decrease our risk of many diseases in the process. 

Recent Research

A British study reported in March confirmed that Vitamin D supplementation in children significantly reduces their risk of developing Type 1 diabetes later in life. Prior to that a Harvard study implicated that low D levels are a significant risk factor for heart disease. Another study from the UK in late 2007 found that higher Vitamin D levels may decrease age-related changes in patients' DNA and perhaps slow the aging process.

Ways to Increase 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 can be safe and is natural and free.

Safe Sun Exposure—Getting it While it's Available

Vitamin D expert Dr. Michael Holick's 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 moder-

References:

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



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