

Vitamin D and Living Above 40 Degrees Latitude

Vitamin D is a hot topic for those of us in the cold climates. More research has come out on vitamin D's important role in our health. Most of us are deficient and taking care of that deficiency may drastically improve health. It has been long known that vitamin D is vital to bone and dental health but there is further evidence that Vitamin D may play a vital role in several other diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, lowered immune system function, some cancers and depression.

Most of us in the northern hemisphere are walking around vitamin D deficient. UVB rays from the sun stimulates the production of vitamin D in our skin and can provide the all the vitamin D needed for health. UVB rays do not go through glass; shade and sunblock SPF 8 or higher considerably blocks UVB rays. For those of us living above 40 degrees latitude (horizontal line from just south of NYC to Northern CA), due to the angle of the sun, there is insufficient UVB rays to produce a healthy amount of vitamin D in our skin from November to March. During the other months, sun exposure of the hands, face, arms, and legs 15 min each day *is sufficient, taking care not to burn skin and preferably getting exposure during the early morning or late afternoon hours. Also, the darker the skin, the less vitamin D the skin will produce as melanin reduces its production. Higher incidences of some cancers are found in African-Americans and higher incidences of diseases like multiple sclerosis are found in the north; researchers are looking at the correlations.*

The other source of vitamin D is food/supplements. Fish and fish liver oils are the best natural food sources. Milk and juices are fortified with vitamin D. Supplements are available but consult your health care provider on an amount. It is possible to overdose on Vitamin D but most likely this will occur from supplements as food has such low amounts and our body has a natural shut off system that does not allow us to take in too much from the sun.

Vitamin D has to go through two transformations in the body, one in the liver and the second in the kidney, before it becomes usable as a hormone called calcitriol. Calcitriol plays a role in calcium absorption, tissue health, blood sugar, gene and neurotransmitter regulation thus Vitamin D's possible link to the various diseases. Vitamin D is deposited in fat as storage therefore obese persons store greater amounts making less available for use. Breast milk tends to have insufficient amounts of Vitamin D thus a supplement may be recommended.

Individual vitamin D levels can be tested by a health care provider through a blood test. Normal ranges are changing as they used to be between 30-74 nanomoles but 80 nm is more commonly seen as necessary and normal. The 100% daily value for Vitamin D is 400IU for adults but there is growing research that this value may not be high enough.

Robert Fox, Shalem Healing in Riverwest, provides Vitamin D testing and treatment. In a few of his clients, taking care of a vitamin D deficiency helped cure depression, chronic respiratory illness, and tremors. Robert recommends the following formula to determine how much Vitamin D you should take: $D = (80 - t) * 100$. D = dose t = test level (blood).

Contact the community health liaison at the Riverwest Health Initiative with health questions or if you are looking for health care resources at k_peterka@coa-yfc.org or (414) 262-8383 ext.139