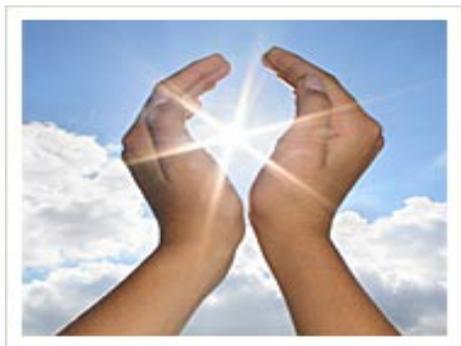


The York University Staff Association Health & Wellness News and Views

Spring is in the air! So why not dedicate this month's newsletter to the "sunshine vitamin". In the last several years, there has been a flood of health news linking vitamin D deficiency with cancer, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, depression, autoimmune diseases, osteoporosis and even autism. As the number of people with vitamin D deficiency continues to increase, the importance of this vitamin in overall health and the prevention of chronic diseases are at the forefront of research. D deficiency is very common in all age groups. According to a Canadian Health Measures Survey, two-thirds of Canadians are not getting adequate amounts of vitamin D in their diets.

Vitamin D is a fat soluble nutrient and is very unique because it can be made in the skin from exposure to sunlight. While your body can't produce vitamin D on its own, it can only be manufactured when your skin is exposed to ultraviolet B light. But the UV index needs to be three or above, and for more than half the year, because of the angle of the sun in the Great White North, Canadians simply can't get proper exposure for the process to be effective. In the summer, you'd need to expose your skin, without sunscreen, for at least 10 minutes a day to get your optimal levels of VD. But as we are all very aware, the strong summer sunshine comes with hazards too, including the risk of melanoma and other types of skin cancer, as well as premature skin aging. While I certainly don't advise that you ditch the sunscreen altogether, it's safe to get a few minutes of exposure without sunscreen. If you're darker skinned, you may be able to get away with 15 to 20 minutes. But for those with a personal or family history of skin cancer, it's best to consult your dermatologist first.

Being low in vitamin D can be hazardous to your health. Vitamin D also supports your immunity, which may be why a lack of it is associated with cancer. Think of your immune system as the watchdog of your health. When it's working properly, it attacks foreign invaders, protecting you from disease. When the immune system is weakened, it can fail to recognize abnormal cells thus leading to illness.



Very few foods naturally contain vitamin D. The flesh of fatty fish such as salmon, swordfish, tuna and fish liver oils are among the most potent sources. Small amounts of VD are found in beef liver, cheese, egg yolks and mushrooms. Fortified foods provide most of the VD in Canadian diets. Orange juice, includes from concentrate, is often fortified with calcium and vitamin D. Calcium as well as VD are one of the building blocks of strong bones. Because our bones consistently are being broken down and rebuilt throughout our lives, we need to eat foods with calcium. Over time, this helps to prevent osteoporosis. Weak bones are more likely to fracture or break. Your body needs Vitamin D to help calcium be absorbed. Therefore dairy products such as milk, and yogurt are also high in fortified VD. When purchasing dairy products be sure to opt for the VD fortified brand. A good tip is to use milk or fortified soy beverage instead of water when making pancakes, muffins, soups, puddings, smoothies and sauces.

Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA,s) for vitamin D vary depending on age, sex, Pregnancy, and breast feeding. Ask your health care provider if you are concerned about your VD levels. Having a blood test to measure the amount of vitamin D in your blood is the only way to know if you're getting sufficient amounts vitamin D in your diet.

A multitude of evidence supports the use of dietary supplements as a safe and effective way to correct vitamin D deficiency. Vitamin D supplements are sold over-the-counter as pills, chewable tablets or drops, and range in concentrations/potency. If you are planning to add VD supplements to your daily routine you should **ALWAYS** discuss Vitamin D therapy with your doctor in case there are reasons why you should not take these supplements.

If you have questions about vitamin D or would like a handout with detailed info about vitamin D food choices, call an EatRight Ontario Registered Dietitian at [1-877-510-5102](tel:1-877-510-5102).

In the meantime, Spring has sprung so do your health some good and get outside and spend some time with your shadow soaking up the sunshine vitamin.

April 2016