

The York University Staff Association Health & Wellness News & Views

Spring is in the air! Well sort of...Typically across Canada, the month of March remains in the grip of harsh winter weather, providing more of the same darkness, brutal cold, wind and snow, especially in the first days of the month. But as the transitional month evolves, it often leads to glimpses of spring's beauty and warmth. And, as we Spring ahead the glimmer of sunshine peeks its glowing head from behind the looming clouds. So why not dedicate this month's newsletter to the "sunshine vitamin" in hopes that this is what we will have much more of in the months to come. It's time to take advice from "Hair" the rock musical of the late 1960's to "Let the Sunshine In". Literally! In the last several years, there has been a flood of health news linking vitamin D deficiency with cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, depression, cancer, autoimmune diseases, osteoporosis and even autism. As the number of Canadians deficient in vitamin D 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. Here are some tips to help you get your vitamin D on.

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble nutrient and is unique because it can be produced in the skin from exposure to natural 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. Due 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 and other diseases. 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. Several recent studies have suggested that the outcome of an infection by the COVID 19 virus may be more serious if blood levels of the vitamin are low. Considering our current ongoing situation with the pandemic, it may be more crucial to pay serious attention to your vitamin D levels now more than ever.



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. It is important to check product labels, as the amount of added vitamin D varies when it is artificially added to products such as orange juice, yogurt and margarine A good tip is

to use milk or fortified soy beverage instead of water when making pancakes, muffins, soups, puddings, smoothies, and sauces. Mushrooms are primarily the only source of vitamin D for vegetarians. Similar to humans, mushrooms can produce their own vitamin D upon exposure to UV light.

Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA,s) for vitamin D vary depending on age, sex, pregnancy, and breast feeding. Ask your doctor 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 truly know if you're getting sufficient amounts of vitamin D in your diet. Although toxicity is rare, it is best to avoid long-term vitamin D doses in excess of 4,000 IU without supervision from a qualified healthcare professional.

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. The Vitamin D Council recommends that healthy adults take 2,000 IU of vitamin D daily -- more if they get little or no sun exposure. 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.

In the meantime, while we await Spring to well, Spring, do your health some good and get outside and spend some time with your shadow soaking up the sunshine vitamin and don't forget to "face it with a grin".

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Vitamin D and Chronic Diseases

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5440113/>

Health at a Glance

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-624-x/2013001/article/11727-eng.htm>

Vitamin D - Mayo Clinic

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/drugs-supplements-vitamin-d/art-20363792>