

Opinion: The importance of vitamin D

By Kelly Vial

With the cool fall weather approaching, it's important to think about an important vitamin we can absorb from the sun: vitamin D. According to city data, South Lake Tahoe boasts an average of 249 days of sunshine per year, so we should all be quite abundant in our vitamin D stores.

However, many of us spend hours indoors and nutrition research shows about 40 percent of adults are lacking this vitamin.



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Below are some common questions about vitamin D and how to get the most from this important nutrient.

What is vitamin D?

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin. This means it is stored in your body's fat, not your blood stream, and must travel through the digestive system for absorption. Vitamin D helps the body absorb important nutrients we get from food, including calcium, magnesium, phosphate, iron and zinc. Vitamin D can enter the body through the skin or diet, is processed by the liver, and activated by the kidneys.

Why is vitamin D important?

Vitamin D is a key component to maintaining healthy bones. Vitamin D deficiency can lead to osteoporosis, which can increase the risk of falls and fractures in older adults. Though less common in the U.S., a deficiency also leads to other bone diseases such rickets in children and softening of the bones (osteomalacia) in children and adults. New research shows vitamin D may help regulate many other cellular functions throughout the body.

Do all people need the same amount?

Some people may require higher vitamin D intake due to certain risk factors. For example, sunscreen and other skin barriers can prevent the absorption of vitamin D. Other barriers include darker skin tone, obesity, and certain diseases. You can also consume too much vitamin D, so be sure to consult with your primary care provider prior to taking a dose higher than the daily recommended intake.

How do I get more vitamin D?

Sources of vitamin D including the following:

- Sunlight. Sun exposure can increase your risk for skin cancer, so be cautious.
- Fortified vitamin D. Look for milk, orange juice, bread, cereal, and other products that add vitamin D.
- Fatty and oily fish. Tuna, sardines, and cod liver all have high vitamin D levels.
- Mushrooms. The kind you buy in the store.
- Vitamin supplements. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) recommends infants who are solely breastfeeding need 400 international units (IU) daily. The IOM suggests 600 IU daily from age 1 to 70 and adults over the age of 70 should take 800 IU daily.

To learn more about vitamin D and its effects on your health, talk to your care provider and see if you are getting an adequate amount of vitamin D.

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