



INTERNATIONAL

NEWS YOU CAN USE

D Party: Vitamin D Gets Its Day In The Sun



An increase in vitamin D deficiency is sparking concern in the medical community. Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin that can be consumed through diet or created in the body after exposure to ultraviolet rays from the sun.¹ The National Academies Food and Nutrition Board recommends a daily intake of 400 international units (IU) for most adults.

The major function of vitamin D is to maintain normal levels of calcium and phosphorus in the blood. By promoting calcium absorption, vitamin D also helps to form and maintain strong bones and teeth. A deficiency in vitamin D leads to poor bone growth and development. This condition causes rickets in children and osteoporosis in adults.² Recent research has also established a link between vitamin D and the prevention of prostate cancer.³

Dietary sources of Vitamin D include fatty fish, egg yolk, and fortified milk. In response to a major health crisis in the 1930s, a national milk fortification program was implemented in the United States. While most milk is still vitamin D fortified, other dairy products—such as cheese, ice cream, sour cream, and yogurt—are not, and most contain only small amounts of this critical nutrient.² These nutritional gaps, along with the fact that milk consumption itself has decreased in children over the past

decade, are creating the concern in the medical community.

Recent research by Dr. Ann Webb of the University of Manchester has caused quite a bit of controversy. Dr. Webb feels that society's increased use of sun protection is contributing to vitamin D deficiency, and she recommends ten to fifteen minutes of unprotected, noontime sun exposure each day to promote vitamin D production.⁴ Members of the American Academy of Dermatology Association disagree, stating that the risk of skin damage—including skin cancer—is simply too great. Both sides of the debate, however, believe that nutritional supplements are a sound choice. Dr. Vincent DeLeo of Columbia University addressed the issue directly. "It is known that there is a high risk of developing skin cancer from repeated and intentional ultraviolet B exposure to boost vitamin D levels; the latter can be safely achieved with nutritional supplements."⁵

It is particularly interesting to note that darker-skinned people have a higher need for vitamin D supplementation. According to Dr. DeLeo, melanin, the natural substance that is more prolific in darker skin, actually reduces

the skin's ability to photosynthesize vitamin D.⁴ This is why the National Institute of Health recommends that individuals with darkly pigmented skin use nutritional supplements to enhance their vitamin D intake.

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References:

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