



Vitamin D: The Sunshine Vitamin



By Julia Chiappetta

We've been enjoying a smattering of warmer temperatures with sunshine added to the end of our days, but winter is still very much present.

That means that our bodies are craving Vitamin D, which is essential for health and produced by our skin when we are in the sunlight. It's a fat-soluble vitamin that may affect up to 2,000 genes in our bodies.

Vitamin D has many healing functions, with the most important being regulating the absorption of calcium and phosphorous. The trick is getting enough; most people don't even know they need it. It helps with bones and teeth, and it's one of my go to vitamins to ward off viruses and colds.

Vitamin D also supports the health of the immune system, brain and nervous system; regulates insulin

levels and aids diabetes management; supports lung function and cardiovascular health; and influences the expression of genes involved in cancer development.

According to Healthline.com, research suggests that vitamin D may also play a role in:

- reducing the risk of multiple sclerosis, according to a 2006 study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association
- decreasing your chance of developing heart disease, according to 2008 findings published in the journal Circulation
- helping to ward off the flu, according to 2010 research published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition
- easing anxiety and depression, where researchers found vitamin D deficiency was common
- weight loss and in the prevention of heart disease.

Our bodies produce vitamin D naturally when we are exposed to the sun, and all we need is 15 minutes of direct

noontime sunlight. We can also get Vitamin D through some foods, but supplementation is the best avenue. Once you have had a simple blood test to determine your level, taking D daily will improve so many aspects of your health and wellness that you won't believe one little gel cap could do so much. Make sure you purchase a high quality D, without gluten or soy.

Some of the symptoms of a vitamin D deficiency are:

- Fatigue, aches, and a sense of not feeling well
- Muscle pain or weakness
- Bone issues like stress fractures

Foods containing vitamin D are: salmon, sardines, egg yolk, shrimp, fortified milk, yogurt, and orange juice. But getting enough through food is almost impossible.

Another interesting fact is that Vitamin D is actually considered a pro-hormone and not a vitamin. This is due to the body being able to produce vitamin D through sunlight on our skin; vitamins are nutrients that cannot be synthesized by the body and must be taken through diet or supplementation.

How much you take depends on your levels. And with much discussion in the medical community as to how much to take and where your levels should be, my research and personal experience is to be as close to the highest point on the scale as possible with continual monitoring, especially during the fall and winter months, when we tend to be indoors more often. Did you know that if you have more melatonin in your skin, you absorb less vitamin D from the sun? That means those of us who tan easily get less D.

So grab some sunshine in a bottle and enjoy the many benefits as we prepare for a beautiful spring and summer.

As always, be good to your body, eat something nutritious and green, and find ways to help others and share your heart with those that need an encouraging word.

Julia Chiappetta is the author of "Breast Cancer: The Notebook" (Gemini Media, 2006) and is also the owner of Julia Chiappetta Consulting. She lives in Cos Cob.