

Bone Up with Vitamin D

Recent data have suggested that the use of sunscreen and sunlight avoidance has resulted in underappreciated vitamin D deficiency. Vitamin D serves many functions, especially helping improve and maintain bone density. Vitamin D is also important for *hormone balance* (improving communications between cells), mood regulation, and metabolism. Its role is vital in cancer protection, such as breast, colon, ovarian, and prostate cancer; all of which are felt to be hormone-modulated cancers. The effect is so significant that in very low-sunlight areas in the United States, the associated risk of breast cancer is two or more times higher than in high sunshine areas. Most experts are now recommending at least 1,000 IU a day for adults and 1,200 IU daily for menopausal women.

The more active form of vitamin D is D3, available in most pharmacies and drugstores. Experts state that up to 2,000 IU a day is a safe upper limit and should not result in any toxicity. Vitamin D is a little hard to come by in food. Milk products are fortified, but usually with only about 90 IU per cup. (Remember you need 1,000 to 1,200 IU a day) Cod liver oil is very high in vitamin D—(1,200 to 1,300 IU per tablespoon), and now that we know about the cancer-protective potential of vitamin D, the spoonful a day of the past makes a lot of sense. Other good sources are salmon (360 IU in 3 ½ oz.) and sardines (250 IU in 1 ¾ oz.). The simplest way to get adequate vitamin D is from an over the counter supplement. Ten minutes of sunshine on legs and forearms three times a week has also been recommended, but accurate dosing is difficult due to differences in skin pigmentation.