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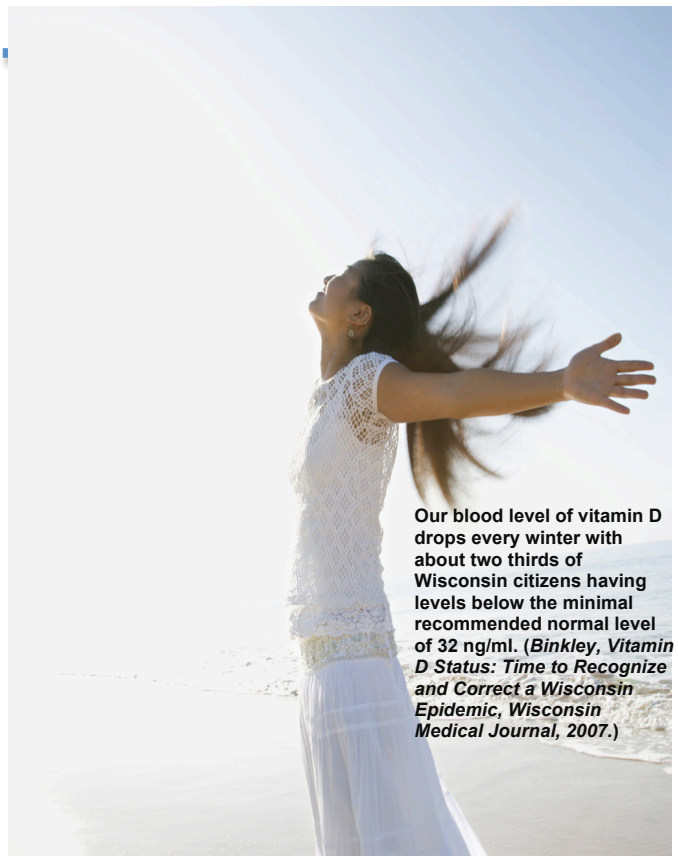


Vitamin D Deficiency

Are You Getting Enough?

May Health Hit 2009

Vitamin D is unique in that your skin manufactures it just by being exposed to sun. The amount made depends on the time of day, season, how far north you live, skin pigmentation (darker skin makes less D), how much of your body is exposed to the sun, and your age (older people produce less D from sun exposure). Because D is fat soluble, the body can store it for days or even months when you don't get any sun or consume any D. Few foods supply vitamin D. Milk is fortified with D and is the major dietary source. Some soymilks, orange juice, margarines, and breakfast cereals are also fortified. Fatty fish, such as salmon, tuna, and sardines, are naturally rich in D. But it's hard to get adequate D from food alone. Many people are deficient in vitamin D, especially those who are over 60, live at northern latitudes, have darker skin, or are rarely outdoors thus, supplements are often necessary.



Our blood level of vitamin D drops every winter with about two thirds of Wisconsin citizens having levels below the minimal recommended normal level of 32 ng/ml. (Binkley, *Vitamin D Status: Time to Recognize and Correct a Wisconsin Epidemic*, *Wisconsin Medical Journal*, 2007.)

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Most experts now agree that blood levels of at least 30 to 40 ng/ml (nanograms per milliliter of blood) of vitamin D are desirable. It's often hard to achieve such levels via current recommended intakes of D and a little sun exposure. Many people, especially those over 60 and during the winter, have levels of 20 ng/ml or below. There is some debate, however, about what the optimal blood levels are.

If you ask for the blood test for vitamin D, your doctor may well say it isn't necessary. It costs about \$100, and insurance may not pay for it unless you have osteoporosis or another condition potentially related to vitamin D deficiency. Exposing your arms and legs or your full body to the midday sun without sunscreen (and not in winter in the northern half of the U.S. or in Canada) can produce high blood levels of D, but can cause skin cancer. That leaves supplements as the best option, unless you know your blood level is in the desirable range.

The official recommended daily intakes for vitamin D, devised by the Institute of Medicine, are 200 IU (international units) for people 50 and younger, 400 IU for those 51 to 70, and 600 IU for those 71 and older. Most people don't consume that much D, unless they drink lots of milk and/or take a multivitamin. However, many researchers believe those guidelines are too low, and that a better goal for everyone, especially those over 60 and/or with darker skin, is 800 to 1,000 IU a day. Some people with low blood levels of D may need even higher intakes to reach the desirable range.

Thus, fifteen leading nutrition experts last year urged the Institute of Medicine to increase its recommended intakes of D. Meanwhile, the Canadian Cancer Society now advises all Canadian adults to take 1,000 IU of D a day during fall and winter, and older and darker-skinned people to take this much year round. That is good advice for most Americans as well.

HEALTH HIT QUESTIONS

MAY 2009

Please email your answers to Christy@answertowellness.com

1. Your body gets Vitamin D primarily from what source?
 - a. Manufactured by your skin with exposure to sunlight
 - b. Fruits and vegetables
 - c. Fortified foods such as milk, margarines, and some breakfast cereals as well as fatty fish
 - d. All of the Above
 - e. A & C

2. Vitamin D is a fat soluble vitamin.
 - a. True
 - b. False

3. People living in Wisconsin are susceptible to greater drops in Vitamin D levels during the winter. Approximately what number of Wisconsin citizens experience a drop in Vitamin D levels below the recommended 32 ng/ml?
 - a. 1/2
 - b. 1/3
 - c. 2/3
 - d. 1/4

4. It is easy to get adequate levels of Vitamin D from sunlight and food alone.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. Most experts agree that blood levels for Vitamin D should be between what range?
 - a. 10-20 ng/ml
 - b. 20-30 ng/ml
 - c. 30-40 ng/ml
 - d. 40-50 ng/ml