

DON'T SEEK THE SUN: TOP REASONS TO GET VITAMIN D FROM YOUR DIET

Research shines dangerous truth on ultraviolet light exposure and vitamin D

Our bodies need vitamin D to build and maintain strong and healthy bodies. Without vitamin D, the body cannot use calcium and phosphorus — two minerals necessary for healthy bones.¹ The American Academy of Dermatology (Academy) does not recommend getting vitamin D from sun exposure (natural) or indoor tanning (artificial) since ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun and tanning beds can lead to the development of skin cancer. Getting vitamin D from a healthy diet (which includes naturally enriched vitamin D foods, fortified foods and beverages and/or vitamin supplements) and practicing sun protection offer a healthier alternative. Still skeptical? Consider these scientific facts:

1. **More than 1 million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in the United States this year.**² While the benefits of vitamin D are well known, it also is well known that overexposure to UV radiation can cause skin cancer.²
2. **UV rays can cause premature aging of the skin and skin cancer.** There is significant scientific evidence to support this fact, which is why the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services classifies UV radiation as a known carcinogen (cancer-causing agent). UV exposure also can lead to cataracts and suppressed immune responses.³
3. **The number of diagnosed cases of skin cancer continues to increase.** Current estimates are that 1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer during their lifetime.⁴
4. **One person dies from melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer, almost every hour (approximately every 62 minutes) in the United States.**² Melanoma is the number one cancer for young adults 25-29 years old and the second most common cancer for adolescents and young adults 15-29 years old.⁵ At current rates, a person has a one in 58 chance of developing melanoma during their lifetime.⁶
5. **Dietary sources of vitamin D do not prematurely age the skin nor increase the risk of developing skin cancer.** Dietary sources (fortified foods and beverages and vitamin supplements) are available year-round. Good sources include fortified milk, cheeses and yogurt, fortified cereal, and oily fish like salmon and tuna.¹ Research shows that vitamin D supplements are well-tolerated, safe and effective when taken as directed by a physician.

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6. **Humans need vitamin D to absorb calcium and phosphorus which are essential for bone health.**¹ Vitamin D increases the efficiency of the body's absorption of calcium 30 to 40 percent and phosphorus by 80 percent. Fortified foods and beverages are rich in both vitamin D and calcium and maintain phosphate levels. Many dietary supplements also contain both of these minerals. Getting enough calcium and vitamin D is essential to prevent osteoporosis in men and women 50 years old and older.¹

7. **Vitamin D from food and dietary supplements offers the same benefits — without the danger of skin cancer — as vitamin D obtained from UV light.**¹ Vitamin D cannot be used by the body until it is processed by the liver and the kidneys. The usable form of vitamin D created by this process is the same — regardless of how it enters the body.¹

8. **Vitamin D intake may not lower cancer mortality.**⁷ While several epidemiological studies have suggested that vitamin D can reduce cancer mortality and/or improve cancer survival, a recent study by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) did not show a correlation between the level of vitamin D and overall cancer mortality for most cancers. Further research is needed to confirm these findings.

The amount of vitamin D an individual needs is an active area of research. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends that anyone concerned about getting enough vitamin D should discuss their options for obtaining sufficient vitamin D from foods and/or vitamin supplements with their doctor.

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¹Wolpowitz D, Gilchrest, BA. The vitamin D questions: how much do you need and how should you get it? JAAD Feb 2006 p 301-17.

²American Cancer Society. 2008 Cancer Facts and Figures.
<http://www.cancer.org/downloads/STT/2008CAFFfinalsecured.pdf>.

³U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, National Toxicology Program. Report on carcinogens, 11th ed: Exposure to sunlamps or sunbeds.

⁴Robinson, K. Sun Exposure, Sun Protection, and Vitamin D. *JAMA*. 2005. 294:1541-1543.

⁵*Cancer Epidemiology in Older Adolescents & Young Adults*. SEER AYA Monograph Pages 53-57. 2007.

⁶*Melanoma of the Skin*, Cancer Fact Sheets, National Cancer Institute, SEER database, 2007.<http://seer.cancer.gov/>.

⁷Freedman MD, Looker AC, Chang S, Graubard BI. Prospective Study of Serum Vitamin D and Cancer Mortality in the United States. *JNCI* 2007.99:1594-1602.