



Vitamin D: It's not just for rickets

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Vitamin D? Isn't that for rickets? Yes. But now we know vitamin D does so much more than that. We've known for a while that vitamin D is essential in helping the body absorb calcium, in maintaining bone density, and in preventing osteoporosis. But new research suggests it may also help protect against chronic diseases such as cancer, type 1 diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, and autoimmune diseases.

Yet many adults have low blood levels of vitamin D. Why? Vitamin D is not abundant in our usual food choices, so we get most of the vitamin from sun exposure and multivitamins. The problem is that the sun is not a reliable source for everyone.

The season, time of day, geography, latitude, level of air pollution, color of your skin, and your age all affect your skin's ability to produce vitamin D. But not all sun exposure is the same, and many factors help determine how much we absorb. In general, the further away you are from the equator, the more efficient the vitamin D production, but cloud cover and air pollution can hinder the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays.

Many people living in the Southern United States can get enough vitamin D by getting about 10-15 minutes of sun exposure on their arms and face a few times a week – as long as they don't use sunscreen, which blocks some of the UV rays necessary to make the vitamin.

So how much exactly do I need? Evidence suggests that infants and adults can tolerate 1,000 IUs a day as safe, without risk of toxicity.

How can I get enough vitamin D? Take a daily vitamin D3 supplement of 1,000 IUs or get safe sun exposure to maintain proper blood levels of vitamin D. Good dietary sources are fortified foods such as milk, yogurt, margarine and cereals, catfish, sardines, salmon, tuna and egg yolks.

In short, chances are, you are not getting enough vitamin D for good health. So boost your D with safe sun exposure, or supplement your diet with 1,000 IUs of vitamin D3 a day. And be sure to eat a variety of foods rich in vitamin D. Also, check with your doctor about guidelines for *safe* sun exposure, supplements that are right for you, and if you need to be tested.



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