



Glynis Barber

THE SUNSHINE VITAMIN

Our holistic columnist on
why getting enough vitamin D
is so important

Vitamin D deficiency is an epidemic around the world. This fact is startling on many levels. Sunlight after all is free (if a little sparse around these parts) and vitamin D is one of the cheapest supplements around. It's also possibly the most vital vitamin for your health.

Every year, new research comes out finding yet another amazing property about this wondrous vitamin. Except that it isn't really a vitamin at all – it's actually a steroid hormone that you are designed to obtain through sun exposure rather than through diet.

Worryingly, many of us stay out of the sun completely, as it's been demonised as something to be avoided at all costs. However, there are now many health practitioners who believe that moderate exposure is vital. This does not mean ditching the sunscreen, especially during the hottest times of the day. In fact, research suggests that as little as 10

minutes of sunshine a day could do the trick.

So, what's so good about vitamin D? Firstly, it can help with mood. Sunlight can have a profound effect on mental health, and vitamin D deficiency is associated with a higher risk of depression.

It's also thought to be anti-ageing. In one study, women with higher levels were found to have fewer age-related changes to their DNA and therefore had longer telomeres, meaning that they aged at a slower rate. Your leukocyte telomere length (LTL) becomes shorter as you get older and is a predictor of many diseases. Chronic inflammation will cause your LTL to shorten at a faster rate but vitamin D inhibits your body's inflammatory response, protecting your LTL.

On top of this, a new study from Japan has found that vitamin D can offer protection against cancer. People with higher levels had a 22 percent lower risk of the disease than those with lower levels. Vitamin D influences every cell in your body, which is why it's so effective at protecting against disease. Vitamin D is converted to calcitriol in the body, which the organs use to repair damage, including that from cancer cells. It can also trigger the death of cancer cells.

Dr Mercola believes that safe sun exposure is the best way to optimise vitamin D levels. However, for those of us living in cold northern climes, this is not always possible and supplementation becomes essential. The best form of the vitamin to take is D3. There are a number of opinions on how much to take, ranging from 400iu to 2,000iu a day. Reuters recently reported that 4000iu a day is the maximum amount, but some doctors even recommend taking 5000-10,000iu a day.



GET MORE VIT D

1. Take your supplement along with K2, as it keeps calcium in its proper place. For every 1000iu of D you take, it's suggested you take 100mg of K2.

2. Vitamin D and K work synergistically with magnesium. Magnesium will also help to keep calcium in your cells, so that they can do their job better.

3. Foods that contain D3 include fatty fish, egg yolks, beef liver and cheese. Eggs and dairy also contain K2.

4. Most people will require D3 supplementation during the winter months. If you already use a supplement, you may want to increase your dosage at this time. It's also good to test your levels occasionally when you have a blood test.

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