



Vitamin D

WHAT IS IT:

Vitamin D is a fat soluble vitamin that has many functions in the body and is essential to adequate bone health. It plays a significant role in regulating cell growth, reducing inflammation, strengthening the immune system and in nerve and muscle functioning. In fact, numerous clinical trials have found a link between cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes and autoimmune disorders and vitamin D deficiencies. It is noteworthy, however, to realize that medical research is ongoing and the significance between these complex disease processes and vitamin D is not yet fully understood.

Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) estimates that approximately 70% of adults have inadequate levels of vitamin D.

SOURCES:

Vitamin D is naturally found in fish (salmon, tuna and mackerel) and is added to various dairy products (milk, yogurt, margarine) and breakfast cereals. Exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays stimulates a complex interaction between the skin, liver and kidneys to produce vitamin D. Usually only 10 minutes of sun three to four times a week is all that is necessary to maintain adequate levels of vitamin D.

The Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for most adults is 600 IU daily. Those older than 70 years of age or anyone at risk for osteoporosis should receive 800 IU each day. Some evidence suggests that D₃ (cholecalciferol) is more readily converted to its active form within the body and may therefore be more powerful in decreasing the risk of death compared to the D₂ (ergocalciferol) form. However, more research is needed and both supplemental forms are effective in increasing vitamin D levels within the body.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that breastfed infants be supplemented with 400 IU per day.

EVALUATION:

A simple blood test can be done to evaluate the vitamin D level (25-hydroxyvitamin D or 25OHD). It should be at least 30 ng/mL.

Some of the risk factors associated with insufficient vitamin D levels include:

- obesity
- dark skin
- decreased exposure to the sun
- pregnant and lactating women
- regular use of sunscreen
- low dietary intake or malabsorption (*including bypass surgery*)
- severe renal or liver disease
- certain medications (*anticonvulsant or antituberculosis*)
- decreased bone mineral density

NOTE:

As with all supplementation, more is not necessarily better. Since fat soluble vitamins are not excreted quickly and easily in the urine, vitamin D levels could exceed normal limits with excessive supplementation.

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