



American Academy of Dermatology and AAD Association

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

Research shines dangerous truth on sun exposure and vitamin D

Our bodies need vitamin D to build and maintain strong bones. Without vitamin D, the body cannot use calcium and phosphorus — two minerals necessary for healthy bones. The American Academy of Dermatology (Academy) does not recommend getting vitamin D from sun exposure or indoor tanning. Both sources emit ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Getting vitamin D from your diet and practicing sun protection offer a healthier alternative. Still skeptical? Consider these scientific facts:

- 1. UV rays cause premature aging of the skin, actinic keratoses and skin cancer.** There is so much scientific evidence to support this fact that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services classifies UV radiation as a known carcinogen (cancer-causing agent). UV exposure also causes cataracts and suppresses the body's immune system.
- 2. More than 1 million cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed this year.** While the benefits of vitamin D in helping to reduce the risk of many cancers have yet to be fully proven, it is well known that overexposure to UV radiation causes skin cancer.
- 3. The number of diagnosed cases of skin cancer continues to increase at an alarming rate.** At current rates, 1 in 5 Americans will develop skin cancer during their lifetime.
- 4. One person dies from melanoma, a type of skin cancer, almost every hour (approximately every 65 minutes) in the United States.** Today, melanoma is the second most prevalent form of cancer among women aged 20 to 29. There will be about 108,230 new cases of melanoma in 2007. At current rates, a person has a one in 33 chance of developing melanoma.
- 5. Dietary sources of vitamin D do not prematurely age the skin nor increase the risk of developing skin cancer or actinic keratoses.** Dietary sources are available year round. Good sources include fortified milk, fortified cereal, salmon, mackerel and cod liver oil. Research shows that vitamin D supplements are well-tolerated, safe and effective.

- 6. Sunscreen use does not cause vitamin D deficiency.** A research study conducted in Australia, which has the highest incidence of skin cancer in the world, found that sunscreen did not cause vitamin D deficiency in all 113 people who wore adequate sunscreen to prevent actinic keratoses. Research shows that sunscreen helps prevent premature aging, actinic keratoses and skin cancer.

When used correctly, sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 15, the minimum recommended by the Academy, deflects or absorbs 93 percent of the sun's UVB rays and allows 7 percent to penetrate skin. In addition, the average person requires one ounce of sunscreen, enough to fill a shot glass, to adequately cover the exposed areas of the body. However, most people don't use enough sunscreen to receive the level of protection that is indicated on the package. Many people also fail to apply sunscreen at least 15-30 minutes before going outdoors in order to allow it to be completely absorbed into the skin, and they neglect to re-apply it every two hours or after swimming.

- 7. Humans need calcium to benefit from vitamin D.** Sun exposure does not provide calcium. However, fortified milk, other vitamin D-fortified dairy products, and salmon are rich in both vitamin D and calcium. Many dietary supplements also contain both. Getting enough calcium and vitamin D is essential to prevent osteoporosis.
- 8. Vitamin D from food and dietary supplements offers the same benefits — without the danger of UV exposure — as vitamin D obtained from the sun.** 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.
- 9. Maximum production of vitamin D occurs after brief exposure to UV radiation.** The exact amount of time depends on many factors including location, time of day, time of year, and skin type. For a fair-skinned person in Boston or New York, at noon in June, it is 2-5 minutes. After this, any additional vitamin D that the body produces will not be stored for future use. Additional unprotected exposure will result in an increased risk of premature aging and skin cancer.