

Four Tips to Maintaining Healthy Vitamin D Levels

Emerging evidence shows associations between vitamin D deficiency and several serious health conditions, making it critical the general public know how to maintain adequate vitamin D levels.

Vitamin D, otherwise known as the “Sunshine Vitamin,” plays a major role in helping people achieve good health, including maintaining strong bones and adequate calcium levels in the blood. Unfortunately, more people are working longer hours indoors and thus limiting their sun exposure. Reports now show that over 1 billion people worldwide are vitamin D deficient, and **in the U.S., it is estimated that 77% of adults are insufficient or deficient.**¹ While vitamin D deficiency has long been associated with increased risk of rickets and osteoporosis, newer studies show an association with inadequate levels and an increased risk for cardiovascular and autoimmune disease¹, along with certain types of cancer.² With so many of these health issues being potentially deadly – cancer of the breast, colon, ovary, and prostate³—it’s critical the public now know how to take control of their vitamin D levels.

Siemens Healthcare Diagnostics—a leading global clinical diagnostics company offering a broad portfolio of performance-driven solutions that assist in the diagnosis, treatment, and monitoring of disease—suggests the following four tips to aid in maintaining healthy levels of vitamin D:

1. **Know Your Number.** A simple blood test ordered by your physician can assess your current vitamin D sufficiency level compared to federally recommended guidelines.⁴ Some tests even help doctors obtain a more accurate, reliable measurement of your *total* vitamin D level, which looks at the two most important forms of vitamin D to humans: D2 (found in plants) and D3 (produced in human skin when it is exposed to sunlight). By knowing your total vitamin D number, you and your physician can develop a plan to help you maintain healthy levels of this critical nutrient.
2. **Get Some Sun.** It is well established that sun exposure plays a crucial role in the daily production of vitamin D, however, too much unprotected exposure increases the risk of developing skin cancer. Interestingly, research finds that as little as 10 minutes of direct sunlight in certain populations is thought to help prevent deficiencies.⁵ Those with darker skin typically require longer exposure to achieve the same benefits due to higher levels of melanin— a known solar ultraviolet-B radiation blocker – in the skin.⁶
3. **Eat more vitamin D-rich foods.** While few foods are rich in vitamin D, regularly eating foods that *do* contain Vitamin D is one way to help maintain adequate levels. About three ounces of cooked salmon or mackerel supplies 90 percent of the U.S. daily recommended intake of vitamin D, currently at 5 mcg (200 International Units or IU) for children and adults, and slightly higher for those age 50 or older.⁷ Slightly less than two ounces of canned sardines in oil or three ounces of canned tuna fish in oil supply 70 and 50 percent respectively.⁸ White mushrooms, carrots, and all types of dark leafy greens such as spinach and collard greens also contain healthy amounts of vitamin D. Fortified brands of milk, juices, and cereal products also serve as important food sources of vitamin D.

4. **Consider Supplements.** In addition to eating more vitamin D-rich foods, taking daily vitamin D supplements is another way to help ensure your body is receiving adequate amounts. This is especially important for populations most at-risk for deficiency, including breastfed infants, the elderly, certain ethnic groups, and those who have insufficient exposure to the sun's UV rays.² Also, many women who are vitamin D deficient during pregnancy take supplements to ensure that they and their unborn baby have adequate of the hormone. Your doctor can help you determine which type of vitamin D supplement and the amount that is right for you.

Following these four tips can help you achieve and maintain healthy levels of vitamin D, whether or not you are deficient. As always, check with your doctor before making any significant changes to your lifestyle or diet.

For more information on vitamin D, vitamin D deficiency, and the importance of measuring vitamin D total, visit: www.siemens.com/VitaminD

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¹ <http://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/vitaminD/>; Holick MF "Vitamin D deficiency". N. Engl. J. Med. (2007) 357 (3): 266–81

² Holick MF. N. Engl. J. Med. 2007; 266-81. Hyppönen E et al., Lancet (2001); 358: 1500-3 ; Pittas AG et al., Diabetes Care (2006); 29: 650-6. ; Munger KL et al., JAMA (2006); 296: 2832-8. ; Abbas A, et al. Carcinogenesis vol.29 no.1 pp.93–99, 2008 ; Drechsler C, et al. European Heart Journal (2010) 31, 2253–2261

³ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11920550?dopt=Abstract>

⁴ http://www.cdc.gov/nutritionreport/part_2b.html

⁵ http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/vitamin-d/NS_patient-vitamin-d

⁶ Bringham FR, et.al., "Bone and Mineral Metabolism in Health and Disease" ; Chapter 23 of "Harrison's Endocrinology", J. Larry Jameson, editor, McGraw-Hill Medical Publishing Division, copyright 2006

⁷ U.S. Department of Agriculture -

<http://www.ion.edu/Global/News%20Announcements/~media/474B28C39EA34C43A60A6D42CCE07427.ashx>

⁸ http://vitamins.lovetoknow.com/Foods_with_Vitamin_D