

Vitamin D, the Sun & Your Health!

Remember the lyrics from the 1980's musical *Hair*, "let the sun shine in." Well we're discovering just how much vitamin D—the sunshine vitamin—is needed to optimize your health.

So if you've been slathering on the sun block and skirting sun exposure, you'll want to pay attention...

Up to 85% of Americans are vitamin D deficient!

There's a new standard for what constitutes an "adequate" level of vitamin D. Early in my career, it was drilled into our heads not to prescribe too much of the fat-soluble vitamins, like vitamin D—because it could build up to toxic levels in your body. But as I found out with my cardiovascular patients years ago, the mere 400 IUs of vitamin D we were told to prescribe wasn't nearly enough.

Plus, we're learning that not all forms of vitamin D are equal. There are actually two forms, D2 and D3. D2 is found in some foods, and a lot of preparations. But it's less active than D3, which is the form of vitamin D your skin manufactures with exposure to UV light (sunshine). Plus, we're learning that D3 is just as much hormone as it is a nutrient, and getting enough is critical for preventing many diseases.

Without enough vitamin D, you're at higher risk for everything from diabetes to cancer

We've long-known that vitamin D helps with the absorption of calcium and phosphorous, which are vital nutrients for bone health. That's why vitamin D deficiencies are linked with rickets. Now we know that vitamin D affects your immune system as well, modulating many activities in the body—including promoting anti-tumor activity.

In fact, the number of health conditions linked with low levels of vitamin D is extremely long and growing. Just look at the latest research...

- Human and animal studies have shown that vitamin D deficiency impairs insulin synthesis and secretions. In fact, of the 23 million Americans with diabetes many are deficient in vitamin D.



Dr. Stephen Sinatra is a practicing cardiologist with an integrative approach to health and healing. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Dr. Sinatra is also the author of the monthly newsletter ***Heart, Health & Nutrition***, which includes his best advice on heart health, diet and nutrition, exercise, and much more.

- In a study of 3,000 type I diabetics, there was a *decreased* disease risk for those who took vitamin D supplements.
- In a European study of 3,369 men ages 40–79, low levels of vitamin D were associated with poorer scores on cognitive tests.
- Human, animal, and epidemiologic studies have suggested that vitamin D plays a role in preventing certain cancers, including prostate, breast and colon cancers.

Plus, studies have found that low levels of vitamin D are also associated with type 1 diabetes, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, Crohn's disease, hypertension, fibromyalgia, and cardiovascular disease. Some research has even linked vitamin D deficiencies with PMS.

What's the best way to ensure you're not on the vitamin D "risk list?"

What I tell my patients is they need to shoot for 2,000–4,000 IUs of vitamin D3 a day if they're healthy, and 5,000 to 10,000 IUs daily if they're compromised with a chronic illness, or even an illness of uncertain cause like fibromyalgia. The best way to get that is through a good vitamin D supplement, and eating foods like vitamin D fortified milk, salmon, and tuna.

If you're taking any medications, and especially blood thinners or laxatives—you need to be careful since they can deplete your body's store of vitamin D. In fact, if you're taking these medications, you want to *insist* that your doctor periodically test your vitamin D levels.

Now, let's get back to the sunshine factor. To ensure you have adequate levels of vitamin D, you also want to get at least 20 minutes a day of sun exposure. Which brings me to my next point...

Is "sun phobia" making us vitamin D deficient?

As some of you know, my mom had a history of melanoma. But still, I would get her out in the backyard for a short dose of sunshine, shading her face with a big hat and covering her Irish skin with a light long sleeved shirt and slacks in warm weather. On chilly days, we'd expose the back of her hands while we chatted outside in coats and cover.

In fact, a recently published study suggests that an optimum Vitamin D level can actually *protect us from cancer* due to its properties of D3—which we're still exploring. Plus research is revealing that when it comes to vitamin D and sun exposure, we're all unique.

Some of us may be able to garner more protection from cancer due to the hormone-like properties of vitamin D than others. For instance, an Italian study suggests there's a specific gene—the BSml gene—that's related to melanoma.

And the newest research is investigating whether sun exposure may have an “anti-melanoma effect”—due to the activation of vitamin D.

The bottom line...

You must have adequate vitamin D, and especially D3, for optimum health. If you are already diagnosed with diabetes, you can prevent complications, and perhaps turn your condition on its tail by addressing your vitamin D status. Ask your MD to get a level if it hasn't been done. Same for folks at risk for or suffering with cognitive decline, or any of the other health concerns mentioned.

The truth is we should all have our vitamin D levels evaluated when we have routine blood work to know where we stand. Getting enough vitamin D to protect your health is so easy and cost effective it's just a no-brainer!

To Your Health,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Sinatra M.D." in a cursive script.

Stephen Sinatra, M.D., F.A.C.C., F.A.C.N.