

## Vitamin D: It's Hot!

Vitamin D is probably one of the “hottest” supplements around right now, and not just because it's good for you. Vitamin D is also known as the “sunshine vitamin” since we need exposure to sun in order for our bodies to produce it. Unfortunately, our dark Canadian winters don't provide us with sufficient sunshine for our bodies to make enough Vitamin D for healthy living.

Vitamin D deficiency, or Rickets, has been a problem for centuries. Vitamin D occurs naturally in very few foods so our bodies rely solely on sun exposure for its supply. In the 1900's children were given a teaspoon of cod liver oil (an excellent source of Vitamin D) everyday, and Rickets became less of an issue. Now as we avoid the sun for fear of cancer and eat diets low in Vitamin D, its deficiency is again becoming a reality.

Years of research has shown that Vitamin D is just as important for bone health as calcium. With or without calcium, Vitamin D has been shown to decrease the risk of fractures by increasing bone strength as well as muscle strength which decreases the chance of falling and causing a fracture.

Perhaps some of the most compelling research being done on Vitamin D right now is in the area of cancer. Studies look promising in decreasing the risk of breast, colorectal and prostate cancers. Vitamin D appears to make the cancers less aggressive and maybe easier to treat. As a bonus, Vitamin D strengthens the immune system, making us stronger to fight the cancer itself. Research is also underway in the areas of Diabetes, Multiple Sclerosis, and Rheumatoid Arthritis. It may make the immune system stronger making it less likely for these autoimmune diseases to attack the body.

The recommended dosage ranges from 400IU to 1000IU, although the safe upper limit is 2000IU. (NB: it takes almost five glasses of milk to make 400IU). Supplements can be purchased on their own or in combination with calcium. Multivitamins also contain about 200IU to 400IU. Vitamin D comes in two forms: D-3 (cholecalciferol), the kind that your body makes in response to the sun, and D-2, that found in fish oil. Your pharmacist can help you choose the supplement and dosage that's best for you.