

Vitamin D and the Sun

What is the problem?

Vitamin D is critical for bone health because it helps the intestines absorb calcium – a major building block for bone. One of the best ways to get vitamin D is through sun exposure since our skin has a unique way of transforming ultraviolet rays to a precursor form of vitamin D. The body also regulates vitamin D production so we don't reach unhealthy levels.

However, the sun brings many potential dangers such as wrinkling, sun burn, and skin cancer (www.skincancer.org). Sun burn, especially in kids, increases their risk of melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer. and overall excessive sun exposure increases basal cell cancer risk substantially over a lifetime.

Some research suggests that small amount of sun exposure is enough to meet daily vitamin D requirements. However, the sun's rays vary dramatically depending on the time of day, the season and the latitude.

What can you do?

Fortunately, vitamin D can be easily acquired through safe and affordable supplements. American Bone Health recommends that most adults take a minimum of 1,000 but not more than 2,000 international units of vitamin D per day. Children also need vitamin D and you should discuss the appropriate dose with your pediatrician.

Look for foods (www.nutritiondata.com) that are fortified with vitamin D and if you are in the sun, see the guidelines from the National Council on Skin Cancer Prevention for sun exposure (www.skincancerprevention.org/Tips).

How can you be sure?

Talk to your doctor about whether you should be tested for vitamin D deficiency. For more information on vitamin D and calcium absorption contact American Bone Health at www.americanbonehealth.org.