Darien Primary Care, INC.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is an essential dietary element. Vitamin D is most known for the role it plays in your body's ability to absorb calcium (without D, the calcium that you eat would pass through your body as waste!).

Vitamin D also plays an important role in the body's nerve system, muscle system, immune system, brain function, and hormone function. Vitamin D plays a role in the inflammation process as well; and virtually all disease states involve an inflammatory response of some sort.

Low levels of Vitamin D may play a role in the development of depression, nervous disorders, muscle pain (particularly in the legs and joints), inflammation, and hormonal imbalance. If you have aches and pains, an evaluation and treatment of your low vitamin D level could be very helpful.

Where does Vitamin D Come From?

Vitamin D is not found in the body, and therefore MUST come from an outside source. For this reason, cow's milk has historically been fortified with vitamin D. Many foods, like cereals, are also fortified with vitamin D. This information can be found on the food label of each food that you eat. Catfish, salmon, tuna, and whole eggs also contain vitamin D.

Vitamin D can also be made by the body as long as the person is getting full exposure in the sun. 15 fully exposed minutes in the sun should be able to give us the needed D, however, we know that full exposure to the sun is not good for our bodies, because full exposure in the sun can contribute largely to the development of skin cancer.

Because the list of foods that contain vitamin D is so small, and because too much sun exposure really isn't the answer, one of the easiest ways to get vitamin D is to take a vitamin D supplement. Look for D2 or D3. Experts say that either form is equally as good to take.

How Much D Should You Take?

The guidelines that have been developed by the national Endocrine Society state that healthy adults need approximately 600-2000 IU daily to maintain vitamin D levels at a "therapeutic level". Pregnant women need 600-1500 IU daily, and elderly individuals should get 800-2000 IU daily. The Endocrine Society also states that levels as high as 4000 IU can be taken safely on a daily basis by adults.

Can you get too much vitamin D?

Although it is not likely that you would ever get too much vitamin D from the foods you eat, or the sunshine that you expose yourself to; it IS possible to take too much vitamin D in the form of a supplement. The Endocrine Society says not to take more than 4000IU daily. Too much vitamin D can in fact be toxic (bad) to the body.

How do you know if you are low in vitamin D?

A simple blood test can tell you if you are low on vitamin D. Ask your health care provider about this testing if you believe you might be deficient, or if you think you might suffer from symptoms of low vitamin D. Specifically, 25-hydroxy vitamin D should be tested, and NOT 1,25 dihydroxy D.