

Get Your Vitamin D the Way Nature Intended

Whenever possible, we should get our nutrients from natural sources, perfectly packaged by Mother Nature with the right proportion of vitamins, minerals, phytonutrients, fiber, carbohydrate, protein, and fat. Obtaining our nutrients from whole natural foods is also safer. We don't have to worry about overdosing or creating nutrient imbalances. So where do we get our vitamin D if it's not coming from a pill? We get vitamin D naturally from the sun.

Vitamin D is actually a hormone that is made when natural sunlight interacts with the cholesterol in our skin. It helps our body to absorb calcium from our digestive tract and is very protective against cancer. Vitamin D made in the skin lasts at least 2-3 times longer in our circulation compared to vitamin D taken as a supplement.

Edible forms of the vitamin are in an inactive precursor form. In order to function as full-fledged vitamin D, it must first pass through the liver and then the kidneys for slight changes to its molecular structure. Matthew Lederman, MD, of Exsalus Health & Wellness Center, has done extensive research into the derivation of the recommended daily allowances for specific nutrients and what peer reviewed scientific studies demonstrate regarding the safety and efficacy of artificial supplements. Dr. Lederman cautions that "supplements are not benign and should be treated like medication (taken as a last resort by people who are truly deficient and/or unable to obtain, absorb, or metabolize the original source)." The only exception that Dr. Lederman notes is supplementation with vitamin B₁₂, which is made by bacteria.

So how much sunlight is adequate, but not excessive? Dr. Lederman created the matrix below to provide a general guide that should be referenced along with other individual factors including our history of skin damage. Dr. Lederman explains that the key is not to experience burning of the skin as that will cause damage and be very harmful. 10-15 minutes, 3-4 times per week is adequate for most people. To reference the general guide below, determine which line most accurately describes your skin type. Take a quick glance at the current UV index (UVI) in your area on weather.com and you can decide how long to spend in the sun without sunscreen. Making time in the spring, summer, and fall for adequate but not excessive sun exposure should store enough vitamin D in our body fat to carry us through the winter. Vitamin D is fat soluble, so excess body fat will pull vitamin D out of circulation, thus contributing to deficiency. So we have yet another good reason to attain and maintain a healthy BMI.

Skin Type	UVI: 0-2	UVI: 3-5	UVI:6-7	UVI: 8-10 & Tanning	UVI: 11+
Always Burn & Never Tan	None	10-15 min.	5-10 min.	2-8 min.	1-5 min.
Easily Burn & Rarely Tan	None	15-20 min.	10-15 min.	5-8 min.	2-8 min.
Occas. Burn & Slowly Tan	None	20-30 min.	15-20 min.	10-15 min.	5-10 min.
Rarely Burn & Rapidly Tan	None	30-40 min.	20-30 min.	15-20 min.	10-15 min.
Never Burn & Always Dark	None	40-60 min.	30-40 min.	20-30 min.	15-20 min.

This chart is shared with permission from Matthew Lederman, MD (www.transitiontohealth.com/) and the Center for Nutrition Studies online certificate program (www.nutritionstudies.org).

Neal Barnard, MD and John McDougall, MD recommend similar guidelines for vitamin D.

The rest of the time, make sure to use sunscreen prudently so that you don't overexpose your skin. The Environmental Working Group provides an annual guide for purchasing sunscreens with the safest ingredients. Here is the link to their current guide:

www.ewg.org/2014sunscreen/

Researchers have discovered that since plants are immobile, they've had to evolve a way to escape threats to their well being. Plants can sense and respond dynamically to all sorts of stimuli: chemical concentrations in the soil, air, and water; touch; motion; vibration; pathogens; predators; and light. Plants respond biochemically. Plants and animals share similar biochemical pathways and signaling systems, which may explain why so many phytonutrients from plants are beneficial to our physiology. Plants that have been stressed are more nutritious because of their antioxidant defenses. Plants have DNA that can be damaged by free radicals created by the sun just like we can, and have had to create antioxidants to defend against them, which can also benefit us if we eat them.

The sun is the source of all life on this planet. Don't miss out on the health benefits it can provide by avoiding it completely.

Sources:

Cancer Survivor's Guide by Neal Barnard, MD

Keep it Simple, Keep it Whole by Alona Pulde, MD and Matthew Lederman, MD

The Starch Solution Certification Course by John McDougall, MD

Appropriating Plant Defenses by Michael Greger, MD, NutritionFacts.org, 5/21/14

March 2011 McDougall Newsletter, Vitamin D: Values for Normal are Exaggerated

September 2007 McDougall Newsletter, Low Vitamin D: One Sign of Sunlight Deficiency

McDougall Message: Sunshine and Vitamin D video presentation by John McDougall, MD