

Do You Really Need More Vitamin D?

Heed the advice offered in many news articles or even by some doctors, and you might think that vitamin D is the answer to many health problems. You might also think that you're deficient in the vitamin, causing you to search for a way to get more of it.

You wouldn't be alone: Sales of vitamin D pills in the U.S. reached an all-time high of \$605 million in 2011, according to the Nutrition Business Journal.

But many of the claims about vitamin D may be wishful thinking. A November 2010 report by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), which examined more than 1,000 studies and other reports, concluded that although vitamin D is essential for healthy bones - and supplements can sometimes be useful for that purpose - evidence of other benefits is inconclusive.



And as for whether we are getting enough vitamin D, the evidence is also unclear. One explanation is that a kind of "deficiency epidemic" developed after some laboratories raised the threshold for what was considered to be a normal blood level of vitamin D. But "the standards many places are using are somewhat arbitrary and not supported by evidence," says Clifford Rosen, M.D. director of clinical and translational research at the Maine Cancer Research Institute in Scarborough and a member of the IOM committee. "It's gotten to the point that nearly 80 percent of people are labeled deficient." With the help of our medical experts we combed through the research to answer some questions.

Who Needs A Supplement?

It depends on your circumstances, you might need more if you don't

get at least some midday sun during warmer months, or if you don't regularly eat foods rich in vitamin D, such as eggs, fatty fish, fortified milk, or soy products. In those cases, a vitamin D supplement might help. People with osteoporosis or conditions like celiac disease or Crohn's disease, which impair the ability to absorb fat-soluble vitamins, might also consider a supplement. People who are dark-skinned, overweight, or middle-aged or older are at increased risk of deficiency, particularly if their diet or lifestyle causes them to get less vitamin D.

But be sure to stay within the recommended level of 600 international units (IU) daily for adults up to age 70 and 800 IU for those over 70. Avoid exceeding 4,000 IU daily unless your doctor has in-

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Do You Really Need More Vitamin D? *(Continued)*

structed you differently. An overabundance of vitamin D can cause kidney damage. Other symptoms of toxic amounts of vitamin D include confusion, constipation, nausea, poor appetite, vomiting, weakness, and weight loss. An analysis of vitamin D supplements by researchers in Oregon, published in JAMA Internal Medicine in February 2013, found that several didn't contain the amount of vitamin D claimed on the label. But in Consumer Reports' recent tests of 32 products, released in March 2013, none came up short.

Should I Be Tested?

There's no need for a test of your vitamin D levels unless your doctor finds you at risk for deficiency. Note that vitamin D levels can fluctuate with diet and exposure to sunlight and test results can vary among laboratories. You're more likely to get an accurate result

from a lab that performs a high volume of vitamin D tests - more than 50 a day. If results are abnormal or unexpected, you should be retested.

Although some labs consider a healthy blood level of vitamin D to be 30 nanograms per milliliter (ng/ml) or higher, the IOM has determined that levels of at least 20 ng/ml are fine to ensure healthy bones. If your levels are far below 20, your doctor may recommend a very high dose of vitamin D for several months, followed by a smaller dose as a daily supplement.

Is D3 Better?

Not particularly. While the D3 form (cholecalciferol) has a reputation for being more potent than the D2 form (ergocalciferol), research suggests that's the case only at high doses. At regular, recommended doses, they work equally well, experts say.

Should I Take Calcium Too?

Taking the two supplements together is worth considering but only if you don't meet the recommended calcium intake through diet: 1,200 milligrams daily for women older than age 50 and men older than 70, and 1,000 mg for other adults. In most of the clinical trials that have linked supplemental vitamin D to denser bones or fewer fractures, the nutrient was combined with calcium. The few studies that looked at vitamin D alone didn't find the same benefits.

Source: webmd.com



Benefits Corner

As part of our monthly newsletter, each month CHP will feature a FAQ to assist the members in utilizing the plan. This month, CHP is featuring 3 FAQ's.

CHP Frequently Asked Questions

1) How can I verify that my provider is in the network?

Call Anthem customer service at 1-866-698-0087 or log on to www.anthem.com; Find a Dr, Colorado, Select plan type "PPO" for Medical and "Dental PPO Plus" for Dental.

2) What if I want to see a provider in another state?

Contact Anthem Customer Service at 1-866-698-0087 to verify the provider is in-network or log on to www.anthem.com, Go to Find a Doctor.

3) If my claim is denied by Anthem is there another step I can take?

Yes, call Anthem customer service and ask to file an appeal. If it is still denied, notify CHP in writing regarding your desire to appeal your denial of claim and it will be presented to the CHP Board of Directors. Information on grievances and appeals can be found on page 62 of your Plan Document. If you have any further questions, contact your CHP Benefit Administrator

If you have a frequently asked question that you feel should be highlighted in our newsletter, please email Meredith Burcham at mburcham@ctsi.org.