

Vitamin D in the winter months
by Dr. Wes Dawkins

The numbers speak for themselves – the most recent estimate suggests that a whopping 97% of Canadians have low levels of vitamin D during the winter months. This shocking statistic and recent research into the health benefits of maintaining optimal levels of vitamin D has prompted the Vitamin D Society to declare the first ever “Vitamin D Awareness Month” last November.

Exposing your skin to sunlight naturally leads to the production of the active form of vitamin D. Your optimal daily dose of vitamin D can be achieved naturally through 15 minutes of sun exposure to 75% of the body. Obviously this level of exposure is nearly impossible to achieve in the winter months and dietary sources of vitamin D are usually inadequate to compensate as only a few foods such as milk and oily fish provide us with vitamin D. This is why our vitamin D levels tend to take a dive as the weather gets colder.

Vitamin D plays a major role in maintaining strong and healthy bones. Osteoporosis starts to become a major concern as we age and proper levels of vitamin D along with several other factors including weight-bearing exercise and proper diet can help to prevent its progression. This is of particular concern for older adults as they are often found to have lowest levels of vitamin D and are most at risk to suffer complications as a result of osteoporosis. Health Canada still suggests that young adults take 400 IU and older adults take 800 IU of vitamin D; however some believe taking higher levels may carry more benefits.

The importance of maintaining adequate levels of vitamin D for bone health has been known for many years but now new research is shedding some light on other potential health benefits. A four-year study involving 1200 women found that those supplementing with 1000 IU of vitamin D had over a 70% reduction in the incidence of cancer. This research prompted the Canadian Cancer Society to recommend that Canadians up their intake of vitamin D to the level of 1000 IU for the purpose of cancer prevention.

The importance of maintaining appropriate levels of vitamin D is apparent. Regardless of the amount you take, it seems that supplementing with vitamin D in some capacity is a good idea for most of us and what better time to start than the cold months of winter when our levels are lowest.

It is advisable to consult with a health care professional before taking any new supplements.

--

Dr. Wes Dawkins is a chiropractor at the Lambton Chiropractic Centre in Petrolia.