Vitamin D – Nutrition’s Sunshine Vitamin

Vitamin D deficiency has long been known as one of the most significant causes of osteoporosis in adults. Now, research findings are emerging which suggest that a lack of vitamin D could also contribute to various different types of cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. It even may help your immune system.

So how do people get Vitamin D? It turns out that only 20 percent of Vitamin D comes from the foods we eat. The top food sources for Vitamin D are tuna, mackerel, salmon (fatty fish), beef liver, egg yolks, and Vitamin D fortified breakfast cereals, soymilk, orange juice, and dairy products. The majority of your Vitamin D comes from the sun. Yes, the sun! When the sun’s UV-B rays hit the skin, a reaction takes place that enables skin cells to manufacture vitamin D. As winter approaches Vitamin D levels should be monitored especially for people living in the North due to decreased sun exposure. We need 15 minutes per day without sunscreen to get enough "natural" vitamin D. This is really important especially as we get older and our bodies cannot make it as efficiently.

Vitamin D deficiency can be determined via a blood level test. OTC supplements or a prescription can be ordered to bring the Vitamin D level to within acceptable range. Low blood levels can be associated with increased risk of death from cardiovascular disease, various forms of cancer, and cognitive impairment in adults. Some research suggests Vitamin D can play a role in prevention and treatment of diabetes, hypertension, and multiple sclerosis. Vitamin D deficiency is a silent condition, which doesn’t produce any apparent symptoms. It is not until much later in life that we have to pay the price.

Interesting fact: Studies indicated that most extreme northern climate people were deficient in Vitamin D but Eskimos were not usually deficient. Why? They eat whale blubber (fat), which is loaded with vitamin D.

So, consult with your physician regarding the need for Vitamin D testing. Also enjoy the “sunny side of winter” - venture out on a sunlit nature walk, participate in outdoor activities such as skiing, sledding, or skating in the upcoming winter months and boost your Vitamin D level - or you can eat whale blubber as another option!

Visit the Lehigh County intranet site to schedule your appointment at the Wellness Centre.