

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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You might have heard recently that the recommendations for how much vitamin D we need are about to change. It's true, and the word is that the amount will be much higher, maybe ever 2 or 3 times as much. The report is due to come out in the next couple of months. We still don't know what the final number will be, but we do know that almost every single person in the US needs a lot more vitamin D than the 400 IU we should getting now.

For years how much vitamin D we need has been based on bones. We know that without vitamin D we can't absorb enough calcium to keep our bones strong. All our calcium supplements also have vitamin D, so that we absorb what we put in our mouths. Milk, the most absorbable source of calcium, is fortified with extra vitamin D to help even more.

But the evidence says we're not getting enough. Close to 70% of the persons admitted to hospitals with hip fractures were severely deficient in vitamin D in their blood. Only a few of the people with broken hips had been taking vitamin D supplements. Over 50% of the women with osteoporosis, or hollow, weak bones, have very low amounts of D in their blood. That suggests that the supplements do help protect our bones.

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But vitamin D does a lot more than protect our bones. It seems that vitamin D is important, especially in the very elderly, for maintaining our muscle strength. So people who have fragile bones are also likely to have weak muscles. That means that they'll fall more easily, and when they do their bones will break more easily. Even if they don't fall, muscles that don't have their D will ache a lot more. Ouch!

Vitamin D seems to be tied up somehow with building our immunity too. If we don't have enough we're more likely to get infections, and less able to get rid of the bad bacteria. So, the person who falls easily and breaks a hip, goes to the hospital for surgery but gets pneumonia is not going to get well very quickly.

Do we need more reasons to eat more vitamin D? There are more! People who don't have enough vitamin D in their blood are more likely to get cancer. Breast, colon and prostate cancers are all linked to vitamin D. Men who start treatment for prostate cancer with higher levels of vitamin D in their blood are more likely to survive, and to survive longer, than those with very little D.

Too little vitamin D has also been connected to depression, to asthma, high blood pressure, to Type 1 diabetes, and to autoimmune diseases like multiple sclerosis (MS). No wonder the recommendations for vitamin D are about to go up!

Part of the problem is that we get very little vitamin D from our food. Milk is fortified with it, but cheese and yoghurt don't have to be. Oily fish have vitamin D, but we don't eat nearly enough of that. Eggs have D, but people avoid them because they think they'll make their cholesterol go up. Some breads and cereals have D added, and we can get fortified orange juice too. But all of these are not enough.

Plus, we stay out of the sun for fear of skin cancer, so don't get the D our skins

could make. When we are out we slather on the sunscreen, which makes it even harder for our skins to make D. The older we are and the darker our skin, the less D we make. What are we to do? Eat good D sources and take a vitamin D supplement. We'll know soon how much we should be taking, but start now with at least one a day.

Here's an easy recipe for some vitamin D. You can use any white fish fillets, flounder, catfish, halibut or others. The shredded cheese might add a little D if it's been fortified. Serve with steamed broccoli or carrots, and a big glass of milk with D!

Easy Fillets

3 pounds fresh or frozen fish fillets	2 large tomatoes
2 Tbsp grated onion	2 Tbsp melted margarine or butter
1 tsp salt	½ tsp ground pepper
4 oz (1 cup) shredded, low-fat Swiss or Provolone cheese	

Thaw fish if frozen. Preheat broiler. Arrange fish in single layer on a greased 6X10 inch broiler pan. Sprinkle onion, salt, pepper and tomatoes over fillets. Drizzle with melted margarine. Broil about 4 inches from heat for 10 to 12 minutes, or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork. Sprinkle with cheese and broil 2-3 minutes longer until cheese softens. Do not overcook or cheese will be tough. Serves 6.