

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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With all the press coverage of new things like antioxidants, phytonutrients and probiotics, we might be excused if we pay less attention to the old, basic vitamins. On the other hand, we might be missing the boat on good health if we do. New research is showing that Vitamin D has a lot more to give than just strong bones and teeth. More specifically, adequate amounts of vitamin D help reduce our risk of falling, reduce muscle pain, increase muscle strength, decrease cancers of colon, prostate and breast, improve immune response to bacteria and might help diabetes. We need our D!

It's been known for decades that vitamin D is necessary for us to absorb our calcium and get it safely stored in bones and teeth. Without D we don't have strong bones. Fragile bones lead to more broken bones, and in the elderly broken bones can keep people home bound or headed for nursing homes. Because of this calcium connection most calcium supplements also contain vitamin D. Milk, one of the best sources of calcium, is fortified with vitamin D to help us absorb it.

But the calcium connection might only be the tip of the iceberg when it comes to everything that vitamin D can do for us. Some hints of these effects came when people started looking at which parts of our body have special receptors, or 'doors', for vitamin D. Besides bones, our intestines, colon, brain, muscles, prostate, breasts, kidneys and immune cells all reach out and grab onto vitamin D floating past in the blood. If vitamin D is only needed for bones and teeth, why does our brain grab it? And there are

certainly no bones in our immune cells!

So, what other evidence is there that we need D? Lots! For example, of 150 people admitted to hospitals with general muscle aches and pains, almost every one had very low levels of vitamin D in their blood. Elderly people with the highest levels of D in their blood performed twice as well on walking, standing up and step tests. Elderly women who had highest blood levels fell half as often as women with low levels.

A combination of studies that have looked at over 200,000 people found that those with the highest blood levels of vitamin D had half the risk of cancer of the colon and rectum. From a group of over 1000 healthy women, the one third who took calcium and vitamin D supplements for 4 years had half the cancer of those who took just calcium supplements. Other studies found similar differences in breast, lung and blood cancer rates.

In our immune system, it appears that without enough vitamin D our immune cells can't make the chemicals that kill invading bacteria. Medication for tuberculosis is much more effective people who take it with vitamin D supplements. And the D produced in our kidneys pushes the pancreas to make more insulin when we need it to manage our blood sugar.

So, where do we get this important stuff, and how much do we need? Vitamin D₃ (cholecalciferol) comes in animal foods such as salt-water fish, eggs and fortified milk. Vitamin D₂ comes from plants or fortified orange juice. The D₃ form is much more effective for most of the uses in our bodies.

Our skin can also make vitamin D when it is exposed to the sun. We need 10 to 15 minutes of sun a day, 2 or 3 times a week. Just having our face and arms exposed,

without sunscreen, is enough for light skinned people. The elderly and those with darker skins need a little longer. If you don't get enough from food or sun, taking a D supplement is a good idea. The recommended amount from any source is 400 IU a day, or 600 for those over age 70, but with all this evidence we might need even more.

Salmon is one good source of vitamin D₃, and so is orange juice. Here's a great recipe that combines them both. Take a stroll around the block while it's baking for even more D. Enjoy!

Baked Salmon, Guam-Style

2 Tbsp vegetable oil	1 ½ lbs salmon fillets
½ C ketchup	½ C orange juice
2 Tbsp lemon juice	2 Tbsp finely chopped celery
2 Tbsp finely chopped onion	1 clove garlic, finely minced

Heat oil in skillet. Add fillets and cook until light brown on both sides. Arrange in single layer in large baking dish. Preheat oven to 350° F. Combine all other ingredients and pour over fish. Bake for 45 minutes or until fish flakes easily with a fork. Serves 10.

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