

How Much Vitamin D Should I Take in the Winter?

by, Jesse A. Stoff, MD, MDH, FAAFP
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This week's question comes from K.W. in North Sea: Last week you mentioned vitamin D, I heard that we need more in the winter time, how much more?

You may have read the recent news and heard the reports on vitamin D (Total 25-hydroxyvitamin D (D2 + D3)). The prestigious Institute of Medicine just upped their vitamin D recommendation from a mere 400 IU per day to a still-paltry 600 IU per day. Wow ... not. And they didn't stop there. They claim most people get enough vitamin D each day. They say no one should take more than 4,000 IU each day.

I've told my patients for decades that everyone needs to take at least 5,000 IU daily. Now this report says I'm wrong. So what should you believe?

Well, I take a scientific approach to things. So if you do a little research on Medline or Vitasearch, you will find literally hundreds of studies that show the health benefits of mid normal ranges of vitamin D. Amongst a myriad of other positive health effects, mid normal ranges of vitamin D build strong bones, support your eyes and heart, boost your immune system, and help relieve joint discomfort. The mid normal range part is important, if you haven't had your Vitamin D level tested, then you should — just to know where you stand.

Normally, when clad in a bikini, or similar attire, your body produces 5,000 to 10,000 IU just from being outside for an hour on a sunny summer day. So why would taking that much in the cold, dark winter do you any harm? It doesn't. No doctor I know has seen any harmful effects from that amount. In fact, I routinely recommend my cancer patients take 10,000 IUs daily, or even 50,000 IU twice weekly or more, with no toxicity.

You see, there's a simple blood test to measure the level of vitamin D in your blood. Everyone — even the Institute of Medicine — agrees that levels below 20 nanograms per milliliter indicate a "serious deficiency." Yet, in the same breath, they said that the too-low level of 20 ng/mL is enough for good health. That's just sheer lunacy. This group is so confused, it's sad. But it's also very dangerous. This report will end up harming a lot of people.

The truth is that there's an epidemic of vitamin D deficiency in this country. Nearly every sick patient I see tests low. I see levels less than 30 in almost every known osteoporosis patient. I see levels in this range with cancer patients as well. Without adequate levels of vitamin D, your body can't mount a good defense.

Consider this: There's not enough sunlight in Southampton during the winter months to make barely any vitamin D. How are these folks supposed to make up the shortfall? What's more, being outdoors is no assurance you're making enough vitamin D on your own. I was pleased that the news reports included "respected" dissenters from major medical centers across the country, including Harvard, UC San Diego and Johns Hopkins. Some of these experts are calling for up to 4,000 IU daily, not too far from my 5,000 IU recommendation.

Dr. John Cannell, of the non-profit Vitamin D Council, is in the thick of all the emerging research. He believes that a level of 70ng/mL is optimal. I push my patients to that level. I'm sticking with my daily 5,000 IU dose, especially in winter. I suggest that you do so as well and get your vitamin D blood level checked.

Send in your questions and be well.

