



USA Today
February 25, 2008
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About Me: As a registered dietitian and mother of three, I know that a hectic schedule often gets in the way of feeding yourself and your family healthy meals. I specialize in creative eating solutions that help you overcome the time crunch and deal with picky eaters. I'd love to know what's on your mind. Leave me a message. Read more about my books, including *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Feeding Your Baby and Toddler*, at www.ElizabethWardRD.com. I look forward to hearing from you!

Top News interests: pregnancy nutrition, child nutrition, women's health, weight management, exercise

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Dietitian Mom

Creative Eating Solutions for Mom and Her Family

The Power of Vitamin D

Posted 2/24/2009 6:09 AM EST

Vitamin D is one of my "pet" nutrients. I like it's underdog quality, and I admire its many strengths. Vitamin D has been in the shadow of calcium for so long that it's hard to believe that calcium would be relatively useless without it. Vitamin D facilitates the absorption of calcium from foods and dietary supplements and supervises the movement of calcium in and out of bones and teeth. In addition, vitamin D intake may help to fend off multiple sclerosis, boost the immune system, and reduce the risk of ovarian and breast cancers. What's not to love about vitamin D?

Vitamin D is one of the few vitamins your body can make on its own. Strong sunlight initiates the production of vitamin D, which is finished off in the liver and kidneys. Problem is, many people do not make enough vitamin D and could have a deficiency that threatens their health in the longterm.

If you live at or above 40°N latitude (about where Boston, MA is located) or at or below 40° S latitude, the sunshine is too weak for about 6 months a year for you to make vitamin D. Wearing sunscreen with an SPF of 8 and above blocks vitamin D production, too. People who stay inside during the warmer months, and the elderly, whose vitamin D production has waned, may come up short for vitamin D.

Overweight people are at risk for vitamin D. Fat holds onto vitamin D and makes it unavailable to strengthen the skeleton and perform all its other wonderful functions.

According to Michael Holick, PhD, MD, a vitamin D researcher at Boston University, overweight people who are deficient in vitamin D may suffer from osteomalacia, characterized by extreme bone and muscle pain and weakness. Ironically, osteomalacia may prevent people from going outside (to participate in physical activity), which means they will make less vitamin D because they are exposed to less sunshine.

According to Holick, and other vitamin D experts, the current recommendations for vitamin D for adults up to age 50 (200 International Units a day - the amount found in 16 ounces of fortified milk) are far too low to reap all the benefits vitamin D has to offer. Chances are, the Dietary Reference Intakes will increase, possibly to 1,000 IU a day for adults. Last Fall, the American Academy of Pediatrics raised the recommended intake of vitamin D for children to 400 IU a day, starting in the first few days of life. Infant formula contains vitamin D, but breast-fed infants require vitamin D supplements.

To get the vitamin D you need during the winter months, and beyond, take a multivitamin every day and include vitamin D-rich foods in your eating plan. Here are some foods with vitamin D that fit into any diet plan, including one for weight loss:

| Food | Vitamin D (IU) |
|--|----------------|
| Salmon, 3½ ounces, cooked, | 360 |
| Tuna, light, canned, drained, 3 ounces, | 200 |
| Milk, all types, 8 ounces, | 100 |
| Orange juice, fortified, 8 ounces, | 100 |
| Yogurt, fortified, 6 to 8 ounces , | 80-100 |
| Cereal, ready-to-eat, fortified, ¾ to 1 cup, | 40-60 |
| Egg, 1 large, whole, cooked any way, | 20 |
| Mushrooms, 1/2 cup, cooked, | 11 |