

The Sunshine Supplement: How to beat a Vitamin D Deficiency

Each of us varies when it comes to the right supplements that match our body types, but one place almost all of us fall short is in the department of vitamin D. This essential nutrient — which is actually a hormone! — is known for reducing depression, boosting our mood and our immunity. As we can't all move our office situation beach-side, functional medicine pro Dr. Mark Hyman goes over the, about realities of vitamin D deficiency, and simple ways we can counter it...

What vitamin deficiency affects over half our population, is rarely diagnosed, has connections to many cancers, high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, depression, fibromyalgia, chronic muscle pain, bone loss and autoimmune diseases like multiple sclerosis? The correct answer would be vitamin D, which actually isn't a vitamin or nutrient; it's a hormone produced from a photolytic reaction with ultraviolet (UV) light.

Many of us live in more northern latitudes (in 2019, that would be pretty much anywhere north of Florida), where ample sunlight is not available year-round. Even for those who do have year-round sunlight, many spend most time indoors or slather on sunscreen when they do go out. That means we probably need to get vitamin D from our diet.

It is best to get nutrition from food whenever possible, but vitamin D presents some obstacles. Food sources are minimal, which is why manufacturers fortify dairy and other food products with vitamin D. Some plants contain small amounts of the non-biologically active form of vitamin D, such as fungi-yeast, molds and mushrooms. The best animal sources are liver, and especially cod, herring, and sardines. Still, unless we're eating 30 ounces of wild salmon a day or downing 10 tablespoons of cod liver oil a day (highly doubtful!), we should supplement with vitamin D to get optimal amounts.

Among the obstacles for your body to make sufficient vitamin D include age. The average 70-year-old creates only 25 percent of the vitamin D a 20-year-old does. The government only recommends 200 to 600 IUs of vitamin D a day. That amount prevents rickets, a disease caused by vitamin D deficiency. But that begs a very serious question: How much vitamin D do we need for **optimal health**, not just deficiencies?

Much more than we think.

When patients reach optimal levels, they frequently report how much better they feel. There are major improvements in their health. That's why nearly every patient needs vitamin D supplements, which are inexpensive and easy to take via capsules, chewables, or liquid drops. At the same time, more vitamin D is not always better and very high levels can become toxic. These five strategies can optimize our levels to get all this workhorse hormone's benefits.

How To Optimize Vitamin D Levels:

- **Get tested** - Before you supplement with vitamin D, you should ask your doctor for a 25-hydroxy test. This will give you an idea of how much you may need to supplement.
- **Take the right form** - Use D3, not D2. Vitamin D3 is lanolin-derived, so strict vegans should find a lichen-derived D3. To improve absorption, take vitamin D with food that contains some fat, since it is a fat-soluble nutrient.
- **Take the right amount** - If you have a deficiency, correct it with 5,000 to 10,000 IU of vitamin D3 a day for three months. (You should ideally combine higher doses of vitamin D with vitamin K.) For maintenance, take 2,000 to 5,000 IU a day of vitamin D3. Some people may need higher doses. We can muscle test you to determine the correct amount for you.
- **Get Rechecked Every 3 Months** - Since Vitamin D is a hormone, it fluctuates for everyone differently. Seasonal changes affect it too. Different "optimal ranges" exist. Ideally aim for levels over 40ng/ml but 60 to 80 ng/ml is an ideal level for health and disease prevention.
- **Be Patient** - It could take 6 – 10 months to "fill up the tank" for vitamin D if you're deficient. Once this occurs, lower that dose to the maintenance dose of 2,000 –5,000 IU a day. (Again, please check with us as to what level is best for you.)