

The "D" Lightful Nutrient

MANY MONTANANS ARE "D"EFICIENT: As the holidays approach, we consider presents for those we love. What should we ask for? What do our friends and relatives want and need? Perhaps a bottle of vitamin D would make a good stocking stuffer!

Montana in the winter is not a sun drenched landscape. Most of us have lifestyles that prevent the sun exposure needed for adequate vitamin D production. If Montana were closer to the equator, our major source of vitamin D would be exposure to direct sunlight, since our bodies make vitamin D in the skin. But the following situations may result in **too little vitamin D production.**

Causes Of Lowered Production of Vitamin D

Clothing blocks sunlight

Spending little or no time outside

Living in northern latitudes, there is an inadequate angle of light rays from November –February to produce optimal amounts of vitamin D at latitudes above 42 degrees (Missoula is at 45 degrees latitude)

Dark skin makes less vitamin D with the same amount of sunlight exposure

Elderly people have decreased ability to produce vitamin D from sun exposure.

Sunscreen blocks UV light and interferes with vitamin D absorption

Exclusively breastfed infants will only get enough vitamin D if their moms have adequate levels

But being deficient in vitamin D can take a toll on more than just your skeleton. Every tissue in the body, including the brain, heart, muscles and immune system, has receptors for vitamin D, meaning that this nutrient is needed at proper levels for all tissues to function well. Low vitamin D levels may account for the incidence of several chronic diseases in this country, **Dr. Holick from Boston University** maintains.



It is rarely possible to consume adequate amounts of vitamin D through foods. For those of us who don't enjoy a small daily glass of cod liver oil, the other main dietary sources are wild-caught oily fish (salmon, mackerel, bluefish, and canned tuna) and fortified milk and baby formula, cereal and orange juice.

You may have heard about the current controversy concerning vitamin D. The Institute of Medicine **released a report** in November of 2010 after two years of study and debate. There is little doubt that additional evidence-based studies will be released regarding this "hot nutrition topic" as research continues.

TESTING: A person's vitamin D level is measured by a simple blood test, considered the best indicator of sufficiency. Work with your health care provider to determine your individual optimum serum level. If acquired naturally through skin, the body's supply of vitamin D has a built-in cutoff preventing overdose. When enough is made, further exposure to sunlight will destroy any excess. Not so when the source is an ingested supplement. It is important for us to request a vitamin D test and work with our health care provider so that we don't join the majority of Montanans who are "D"eficient.