Vitamin D
What you need to know...
By Mary Anne Giacona, Th.M.,

I have the opportunity to meet and talk with many wonderful people who come to The Center. While I am happy to hear that more and more of their physicians are understanding the value of preventive medicine and are recommending supplementation to help their patients get healthy and stay healthy, I find it unfortunate that most of the time when a person is taking a D supplement (for prevention, deficiency, or disease) they are taking an inferior form of vitamin D.

Most prescribed D vitamins are a synthetic D2 (primarily because that’s what insurance companies will pay for). What’s important to know is that D2 (ergocalciferol) is far less effective than its natural counterpart D3 (cholecalciferol). D2 is synthesized by plant life, it is not something that is produced naturally in the human body. Additionally, D2 can actually block D3 from working properly and stress the liver and kidneys making toxicity a greater issue and risk for individuals.

D3 on the other hand is the most “natural” form of D. According to scientific evidence it is approximately three times more effective at maintaining adequate serum concentration levels that D2 with less risk of toxicity. It is most like the D that is naturally synthesized by humans when skin is exposed to sunlight.

Some of you may be wondering why take a D supplement at all? According to a study published in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism, vitamin D has been found to be deficient in more than 59% of the population and is believed to be a major contributor to a whole host of health conditions. In addition, nearly 25 percent of the subjects studied were found to have extremely low levels of vitamin D.

According to numerous studies, a lack of vitamin D has been linked to autoimmune / inflammatory disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, lupus, crohn's disease, all forms of colitis as well as, insulin dependent diabetes mellitus, bone health, brain function, mental/emotional health, fetal development, cardiovascular disease, a variety of cancers ... and the list goes on and on!

No doubt vitamin D is essential for preventing disease and maintaining health. Some of its responsibilities include promoting calcium absorption in the gut and maintaining adequate serum calcium and phosphate concentrations to enable normal mineralization of bone. It also influences over 2000 gene encoding proteins that regulate cell proliferation and differentiation.
With that said, how can we maintain our D levels? The most obvious and ideal way to maintain Vitamin D levels is to expose ourselves to natural sunlight and allow our body to naturally create it (without the use of sunscreen). Exposing at least 40 percent of the body for 30 minutes our system can produce up to 20,000 IUs of D! Problem is if we don’t live in a climate that supports this, if we work indoors the majority of the time, or using sunscreen frequently it can be difficult to maintain optimum levels of Vitamin D.

While tanning beds seem to be a good alternative because they do produce beneficial UVA and UVB rays like the sun, the electronic ballasts on many units (there are models that do not have this, but are difficult to find) emits low levels of radiation at the end of the bulbs which can be potentially harmful.

Other dietary options include eating more fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel and tuna, but for many it is difficult to get sufficient amounts through diet alone. The other option is supplementing through cod liver oil which is a great source of vitamin D, but it must be certified pure with proper testing of mercury to ensure your not adding toxicities to the body.

The bottom line: If you know you’re low or deficient in D, only use a quality vitamin D3 when supplementing or certified pure cod liver oils. If you’re tanning to supplement, inquire about the type of ballasts that are used. If you’re unsure about where your D levels are at, speak to your physician about blood testing to determine if supplementing is appropriate for you.

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