

Vail Daily

Vail Daily column: More reasons to take vitamin D

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Are you getting enough vitamin D from sun exposure? Many of my patients are landscapers, ski instructors' and construction workers. These are individuals who get hours of sun exposure a day. Yet, when we check their vitamin D levels, they're low. So why is vitamin D important? And why should you get your levels checked? Many studies are showing the benefits of vitamin D. A Canadian study on vitamin D and breast cancer risk was published recently stating that vitamin D is safe and important strategy in lowering breast cancer risk. The study included about 6,500 women between the ages of 25 and 74. Approximately half the women were diagnosed with breast cancer and half were not. According to the study results, a vitamin D supplement intake greater than 400 IU/day compared with no vitamin D supplement intake, reduces the risk of breast cancer by about 25 percent. Other studies have demonstrates that raising one's serum level of vitamin D can lower the risk of breast cancer and breast cancer recurrence.

Another recent study shows vitamin D is extremely effective at halting influenza infections in children. The trial appears in the March 2010 issue of the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition. The results are from a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study involving 334 children, half of who were given 1,200 IUs per day of vitamin D3.

Low levels of vitamin D lower our immune system, in turn increasing our risk for colds and flu. In fact vitamin D appears to be much more effective than vaccines at preventing influenza infections in children.

While 31 of 167 children in the placebo group contracted influenza over the four month duration of the study, only 18 of 168 children in the vitamin D group did. This means vitamin D was responsible for an absolute reduction of nearly 8 percent of flu cases. Flu vaccines, according to the latest scientific evidence, achieve a 1 percent reduction in influenza symptoms.

Vitamin D deficiency has also been linked to asthma. Overall, a review published in Annals of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, suggested that vitamin D deficiency may be linked to airway inflammation, decreased lung function and poor asthma control. The review authors hypothesized that vitamin D supplementation may help improve asthma symptoms by preventing the release of inflammatory cytokines and increasing the secretion of anti-inflammatory proteins. Vitamin D is also thought to play a role in immune function, which may benefit patients with allergic asthma.

Many studies are showing that vitamin D also prevents colon cancer. Colon cancer can run in families, so if you have a family history of colon cancer, get your vitamin D levels checked. Studies have also shown that vitamin D can also prevent prostate cancer. The list goes on about the effects of vitamin D. It is also beneficial in many skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis. And let's not forget vitamin D also prevents osteoporosis.

I recently had my vitamin D levels (serum 25 hydroxyvitamin D) checked and came back with 32 ng/ml. This is very low. Even though I have been taking vitamin D supplements for the last 10 years, I am still low. Studies show optimal dose of vitamin D that would achieve a serum 25 hydroxyvitamin D level of more than 52 ng/mL in order to have a 50 percent reduction in breast cancer incidence. I recommend getting it checked as it may prevent many health problems.

Deborah Wiancek owns the Riverwalk Natural Health Clinic in Edwards. She can be reached at 970-926-7606 or Wiancek@healthref.com or www.healthref.com. She will be doing a free lecture today at 5:30 p.m. on increasing longevity and vitality at The Riverwalk Natural Health Clinic.

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