

Shining Some Sunlight on Vitamin D Deficiencies

Written by Karah Van Kammen



By Penny Bowen, M.D., EVDI Medical Imaging

It is summertime, and Arizonans are keeping cool and protecting themselves from the sun by staying in the shade and slathering on sunscreen. While these are important steps to take to avoid the threats of heat stroke and skin cancer, many of us may be missing out on an important nutrient – vitamin D.

Experts say that being outside for just 10 minutes can provide the daily recommended intake of vitamin D created naturally by our bodies in reaction to sun exposure. An essential nutrient for strong bone formation, the vitamin D produced during those 10 minutes goes a long way to helping maintain normal blood levels of calcium and phosphorous to support healthy bones.

We see more than 300 days of sunshine each year in Arizona, providing ample opportunities to soak up a few rays. Surprisingly, we're still at risk for vitamin D deficiency because our climate, especially in the summer months, can make it too difficult to spend quality time outdoors. At EVDI Medical Imaging, I've recently seen several patients with a suspected vitamin D deficiency and it's certainly not uncommon; the Center for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that 32 percent of children and adults in the U.S. are vitamin D deficient.

The symptoms of a deficiency often go unnoticed because they can be very subtle. Discreet signs like joint or bone pain and muscle weakness, or even cognitive impairment in adults can be associated with vitamin D deficiency. If you think you might be at risk, a simple blood test from your doctor is the fastest way to determine your levels.

Luckily, you can also be proactive about getting the daily recommended 1,000 to 2,000 international units (IUs). The following are just a few ideas to incorporate additional vitamin D into your diet while also avoiding the harsh heat:

- **Fatty Fish** – Rich in vitamin D, fatty fish such as salmon, trout and tuna contain as much as 450 IUs.
- **Eggs** – One of the easier ways to consume the nutrient, egg yolks contain 40 IUs.
- **Fortified dairy, juices and grains** – While these products do not naturally contain vitamin D, many companies are fortifying these foods to improve access to the nutrient.
- **Supplements** – For those who are severely deficient, supplements are available at any drug store in doses with as much as 4,000 IUs.

While vitamin D deficiency is more common than we may think, there are several easy ways to make sure you're meeting the recommended dose. Be sure to talk with your doctor about your lifestyle and diet in order to determine the best approach to staying healthy and maintaining strong bones.

Penny Bowen, M.D. is a musculoskeletal radiologist at EVDI Medical Imaging, the Valley's leading diagnostic imaging service. For more information on EVDI and its East Valley locations, visit www.evdi.com.

