

WellnessAdvocate

D-fense for Your Health



Here Comes the Sun

Vitamins like C and E continue to be the darlings of many supplement lovers. But those vitamin superstars are being forced to share their throne with the long neglected vitamin D, which is finally getting the attention it may have always deserved.

"Vitamin D is one of the most potent inhibitors of cancer cell growth," says Michael F. Holick, PhD, MD, who heads the Vitamin D, Skin, and Bone Research Laboratory at Boston University School of Medicine. "It also stimulates your pancreas to make insulin. It regulates your immune system."

Many vitamin D researchers are convinced the government's recommendations for adequate vitamin D intake are far below what your body really needs. Those guidelines call for 200 IU (International Units) a day up to the age of 50, 400 IU from 51 to 70, and 600 IU over age 70.

But, says Holick, studies show that to achieve blood levels of vitamin D that can protect you against chronic diseases, you need an optimal dose of 1,000 IU of vitamin D a day. (The upper limit is 2,000 IU a day.) Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin, so it's stored in the body. If you're taking a supplement that puts your daily intake at more than 2,000 IU, you can get a toxic or overdose effect, which can possibly lead to kidney stones or kidney damage, muscle weakness, or excessive bleeding.

So how can you get enough of this overlooked vitamin naturally? Most foods aren't filled to the brim with vitamin D—far from it. You can get 425 IU in a 3-ounce serving of salmon and 270 IU in 3.5 ounces of canned sardines. But most foods provide much more modest amounts of vitamin D, from egg yolks (25 IU per egg) to cheddar cheese (2.8 IU per ounce). Two glasses of fortified milk provide 200 IUs of vitamin D.




If you're striving for Holick's recommendation of 1,000 IU a day, you may have to turn to vitamin D supplements or the sun as your vitamin D savior. Regular sun exposure can stimulate the human skin to produce quantities of vitamin D that far exceeds your needs. Without a shadow of a doubt (no pun intended), sunlight is the largest single source of vitamin D for most people.

The Perils of Sun Worshiping

The sun isn't all good, of course. As any dermatologist will eagerly tell you, too much sun could risk a lot more than a bad sunburn. Routinely overdosing on sunshine can translate into life-threatening skin cancer. On the other hand, if you're completely sun-phobic from sunrise to sunset, you may pay the price in the amount of vitamin D your body produces, cautions Holick, author of "The UV Advantage."

So how much sun do you dare expose yourself to? Holick has calculated that if you sun yourself in a bathing suit long enough to produce slight redness of the skin, you'll produce the equivalent of 10,000-25,000 IU of oral vitamin D.

"Let's say you're on Cape Cod or a New Jersey beach in the summer," Holick tells WebMD. "Just five to ten minutes in the sun two to three times a week — exposing your hands, legs, and arms — is more than adequate to satisfy your vitamin D requirements, and you're not likely to significantly increase your risk of skin cancer in the process. Then after that five to ten minutes of exposure, put on a sunscreen of SPF 15 or greater for the rest of your time in the sun."

For those of you who live in more southern states, it's a good idea not get that sun between the hours of 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. You may want to consider using a light sunscreen at all times you're outside and a heavier one after five or ten minutes of sun exposure. 

Start Every Day with a Good Night's Sleep!



Sleep. It refreshes us like nothing else. It can be occasionally elusive, almost always comforting, and is definitely essential to our survival. And although we spend 33% of our lives asleep, we barely give it a moment's notice...until we can't sleep. Then we think about it to the point of obsession. For millions of people, the consequences of a poor night's sleep – higher stress, increased mistakes, difficulty concentrating – are every day occurrences. But it doesn't have to be this way.

Take the quiz from [sleep.org](https://www.sleep.org) —Sleep Well, Be Well to gauge how knowledgeable you are on healthy sleep.

There are also a few things you can do to try and get a great night's rest. Try going to bed and getting up at the same time every day—even on the weekends. This will help keep your biological clock in sync. Develop a sleep ritual by doing the same things each night just before bed. Parents often establish a routine for their kids, but it can help adults, too. A routine cues the body to settle down for the night. Another hint: Unwind early in the evening so that worries and distractions don't keep you from getting a good night's sleep.

Finally, create a restful sleep environment—sleep in a cool, quiet, dark room on a comfortable, supportive mattress and foundation—and try to keep all electronics out of the bedroom! If you're sleeping as much as you need, but still find that you're sleepy during the day, you should consult your doctor to see if you might have a medical condition interfering with your sleep.

SPICY, HEALTHY BREAKFAST BOWL

Love spicy breakfasts? This Mexican-inspired breakfast has healthy veggies, including red bell peppers, green onions, jalapenos, spinach, tomato, spices, including possible blood sugar-lowering cumin and cilantro. The black beans add fiber and protein!

Ingredients

- 5 soft corn tortillas (6" diameter)
- 6 green onions, chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, chopped
- 1 jalapeno pepper, seeded and finely chopped (optional)
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tsp ground cumin
- 1 can (15 oz) reduced-sodium black beans, rinsed and drained
- 4 cups baby spinach (about 4 ounces)
- 1 large tomato, chopped
- 1 cup shredded reduced-fat cheddar cheese
- 4 Tbsp reduced-fat sour cream
- Sprigs fresh cilantro (optional)
- Few leaves of lettuce (optional)



Directions

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Stack tortillas on a large piece of foil, sprinkle the top one with water, and wrap in the foil. Heat for 10 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, heat a large nonstick skillet coated with cooking spray over medium-high heat. Add the green onions and bell pepper and cook for 5 minutes or until lightly browned. Add the jalapeno pepper (if using), garlic, and cumin. Cook for 2 minutes or until lightly browned. Stir in the beans, spinach, and tomato. Cook for 2 minutes or until heated through. Spread the mixture evenly in the skillet.
3. Remove from the heat and sprinkle with the cheese. Top with dollops of the sour cream and sprinkle with cilantro and lettuce, if using.
4. Cut the warmed tortillas into quarters or strips. Serve immediately with the taco skillet.

NUTRITION (per serving) 236 cal, 13 g pro, 37 g carb, 8 g fiber, 4.8 g fat, 0.6 g sat fat, 416 mg sodium