



Risk factors like obesity, smoking and poor diet can lower vitamin D levels.

To Supplement or Not?

Confusing Reports About Vit D and Calcium

Consumers are left scratching their heads with recent news about the popular supplement combination — calcium and vitamin D. While it is known that they are essential for bone and teeth health, it's not clear that taking these supplements do everything they've been purported to do, like protect against broken bones, cancer and heart disease.

In 2013, the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force reported that taking calcium and vitamin D supplements do not prevent fractures among healthy postmenopausal women. Then, earlier this year, a new study performed at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland found little benefit of taking vitamin D. In fact, the only benefit identified was a link between vitamin D levels in late pregnancy and healthy newborn birth weights.

However, a study done at Erasmus University Medical Center in the Netherlands linked vitamin D3 supplementation to an 11 percent reduction in the risk of death. But this study was small and focused on the elderly.

In an editorial accompanying the study, Naveed Sattar, a medical professor at the University of Glasgow, Scotland explained that "There is an assumption that low blood vitamin D levels are causing or contributing to risk for many diseases but recent research tells us that, in fact, the opposite is the case and that having the disease in the first place leads to people having low vitamin D levels." He further explained that risk factors like obesity, smoking and poor diet can lower vitamin D levels so that it is more important to correct the risk factors than to try to adjust low vitamin D levels.

Vitamin D: How Much and is Testing Accurate?

There continues to be scientific debate about what constitutes an optimal level of vitamin D: <20 ng/ml or <30 ng/ml. In addition, there are numerous testing methods and no internationally-recognized reference standard for measuring vitamin D levels. Since a clear definition of vitamin D deficiency has not been determined, it is difficult to

Can You Take Too Much?

Yes! Too much calcium in your blood is called hypercalcemia, which can weaken your bones, cause kidney stones, and interfere with heart and brain function. It is seen in people who have overactive parathyroid glands, cancer, and who take excessive doses of calcium and vitamin D.

Let Us Know How We Can Help...

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know if a person is really deficient and how much vitamin D is needed to correct deficiency given that testing may not be consistent.

Many Considerations...

Since calcium supplements don't appear to prevent fractures in healthy older women and have been associated with an increased risk for heart attack and the development of kidney stones, does it make sense to take them? Experts suggest patients talk to their doctors and perform a risk/benefit analysis.

As Dr. Sattar suggests, addressing risk factors, such as smoking and obesity, could have the added benefit of improving vitamin D levels.

Consider how much calcium and vitamin D comes from your diet. Good food sources of calcium include dairy products (milk, cheese and yogurt), soybeans, dark leafy greens (spinach, kale, collard greens), fish with soft edible bones (sardines and salmon), and fortified juices and bread products. A calcium-rich diet and regular exercise can help keep bones strong and may eliminate the need for supplementation.

Calcium's partner, vitamin D is important too because it helps the body absorb calcium and is essential to a healthy immune system. Very few foods naturally contain vitamin D. Fatty fish (salmon, tuna and mackerel) are the best bet. Mushrooms, beef

liver, cheese and egg yolks offer small amounts. Other products like milk, juices and cereals are fortified with both calcium and vitamin D. The sun is the best natural, though controversial, source of vitamin D. Unless you have had or are specifically at risk for developing skin cancer, dermatologists will often recommend sun exposure of no more than 15 minutes a day.

Supplements will most likely be recommended for people who:

- Follow a vegan diet.
- Are lactose intolerant and limit dairy intake.
- Consume large amounts of protein or sodium which can cause your body to excrete calcium.
- Take corticosteroids like prednisone or cortisone.
- Have bowel or digestive diseases like celiac or inflammatory bowel disease that decrease your ability to absorb calcium.
- Spend little time outdoors.
- Have osteoporosis.
- Are inactive.

Now What?

Like all health decisions, the decision to take calcium or vitamin D supplements depends upon your particular situation. Your age, gender, risk factors and health status are important considerations. Your KnovaSolutions nurse can help you decide!

The information contained in this newsletter is for general, educational purposes. It should not be considered a replacement for consultation with your healthcare provider. If you have concerns about your health, please contact your healthcare provider.