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north shore news

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Time to get your D

As we approach the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, it's clear that in many areas of North America, sunshine is in short supply. What's more startling is that many North Americans - studies suggest 30 to 50 per cent - are deficient in the sunshine vitamin, Vitamin D.

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According to nutrition expert Gloria Tsang, founder of HealthCastle.com, vitamin D deficiency is an issue all year long, not just during winter days with few sunshine hours - but the winter season is an especially important time to ensure good vitamin D levels, since the sunshine vitamin helps protect against winter flu. "We call vitamin D the sunshine vitamin," Tsang says, "But the reality is that most people don't get enough vitamin D from the sun at any time of year - especially since it's now so important to protect our skin from the damaging effects of the sun. We can get some vitamin D from food sources, but the truth is that just about everyone should be taking a vitamin D supplement, too."

In addition to helping fight the flu, vitamin D has other important effects in the body. It aids calcium and phosphorus absorption, helping prevent bone diseases like rickets and osteoporosis, and studies have shown that it has a strong association with lowered cancer risk.

Here are 5 key ways to get more Vitamin D:

Feast on fish:

Fatty fish, like salmon, tuna, sardines, and mackerel, as well as cod liver oil, are the best food sources of vitamin D.

Enjoy eggs

Egg yolks contain small amounts of vitamin D3.

Find fortified foods

Milk fortified with vitamin D virtually eliminated rickets in the 1930s, and is still a prime source of vitamin D today. Other vitamin D-fortified foods include breakfast cereals, yogurt, and orange juice.

Munch on mushrooms

Some mushrooms contain vitamin D2, including some mushrooms grown in conditions specifically designed to boost vitamin D content.

Be safe

Take a supplement: Expert opinions vary on how much vitamin D we need (some experts recommend up to 1000 IU per day for adults), but most agree we're not getting enough. Since it's hard to absorb vitamin D from food sources, your safest best is to take a supplement, especially in the winter.

Of course, we all get some of our vitamin D supply from the sun - but increasing your sun exposure to up your vitamin D intake is not a good idea, since the potential risks to your skin outweigh the benefits of the additional vitamin D. Focus on eating vitamin D-containing foods instead, and top up your intake with a good supplement. More healthy eating tips from registered dietitians are available at www.HealthCastle.com.

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