



B.C. Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association

MEMBER UPDATE

ReFresh

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This week...

D is for Defense

Vitamin D that is.

Vitamin D is sometimes called the 'sunshine vitamin' because it's produced in your skin in response to sunlight. Coming out of our grey winter, with limited exposure to sunshine, has likely left us a little Vitamin D deficient. With the summer months around the corner, we may produce boosts of Vitamin D, depending on your skin tone and the number of hours exposed. However, getting all your Vitamin D this way is a tricky balance between needing enough sun time and decreasing our risk of skin cancer.

Why do we need Vitamin D anyways?

Vitamin D has multiple roles in the body:

1. It promotes **healthy bones and teeth**. Ensuring you have enough Vitamin D defends against osteoporosis and osteomalacia: the softening of bones resulting in poor bone density and muscular weakness.
2. It supports **immune, brain, and nervous system health** – defending you against a variety of diseases. Studies show Vitamin D reduces your risk of multiple sclerosis, and also might play an important role in regulating mood and warding off depression. In one study, people with depression who received Vitamin D supplements noticed an improvement in their symptoms.
3. It regulates **insulin levels** and supports diabetes management.
4. It supports **lung function and cardiovascular health**, defending you against the risk of heart disease.
5. It influences the **expression of genes involved in cancer development**. It especially defends against breast, prostate, and colon cancers.

There has been much recent discussion and research regarding Vitamin D and the prevention of COVID-19. One study found that more than 80 per cent of those diagnosed with COVID-19 were Vitamin D deficient. Another recent study found that hospitalized COVID-19 patients with low Vitamin D levels were less likely to die or require ventilators if they were given supplements of the compound. Overall, at this point, it seems that if your body has good levels of Vitamin D, your chances of contracting or getting really sick from COVID-19 are reduced. However, more research is needed to generate concrete conclusions.

Beware of D-ficiency

Many factors can affect your ability to get sufficient amounts of Vitamin D through the sun alone. These factors include:

- Being in an area with high pollution
- Using sunscreen
- Spending more time indoors
- Living in big cities where buildings block sunlight
- Having darker skin (the higher the levels of melanin, the less Vitamin D the skin can absorb.)

These factors contribute to Vitamin D deficiency in an increasing number of people. That's why it's important to get some of your Vitamin D from sources besides sunlight.

Doctors can diagnose a Vitamin D deficiency by performing a simple blood test. If you have a deficiency, your doctor may order X-rays to check the strength of your bones. If you're diagnosed with a Vitamin D deficiency, your doctor will likely recommend daily Vitamin D supplements. If you have a severe deficiency, they may instead recommend high-dose Vitamin D tablets or liquids. Although not often published, it is important to take your Vitamin D supplements with a little fat for best absorption. You can find Omega 3 capsules (that have fish oil) that also contain Vitamin D – why not boost your brain health at the same time!

Food Sources of Vitamin D

It can be hard to get enough Vitamin D each day through sun exposure and food alone as few foods contain Vitamin D naturally. Because of this, some foods are fortified by adding Vitamin D. This is why many physicians recommend taking Vitamin D supplements as well.

Foods that contain Vitamin D include:

- fatty fish (e.g. salmon, mackerel, sardines, tuna)
- egg yolk
- shrimp
- cheese
- beef liver
- mushrooms
- cereal (fortified)
- yogurt (fortified)
- orange juice (fortified)

How much is enough? See Health Canada's recommendations for dietary allowances for Vitamin D [here](#).

Boost your D-fence

Grab your sunglasses, lather on sunscreen, and soak up some rays a few times a day! Boost your Vitamin D body sources through supplements and specific foods and help your body be its best defender.

If you would like to contribute, or have ideas about what you would like to see in the [ReFresh](#) series, we would love to hear from you: contact rochelle@bcpvpa.bc.ca.

Sources:

- Medical News Today | [Sources of Vitamin D](#)
- Healthline | [Benefits of Vitamin D](#)
- CTV News | [“High Vitamin D Levels may protect against COVID-19”](#)