

VITAMIN D for a Long & Healthy Life

RESEARCHERS HAVE LINKED VITAMIN D TO A LONGER LIFE, according to a new study published online in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* in August, 2008.

Researchers tracked the vitamin D level of 13,000 men and women over eight and a half years and found that a dietary deficiency of vitamin D was associated with an increased risk of death from all causes by 26 percent. During the study, 1,806 people died. Of the 777 who died from cardiovascular disease, more than half were deficient in vitamin D.

Study co-author Michal Melamed, MD, an assistant professor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in Bronx, N.Y., notes that vitamin D affects many of the body's organs, and deficiency is known to be a risk factor for heart attacks, depression, diabetes, cancer and other diseases. While the study did not pinpoint any of these as a cause of mortality, Dr. Melamed says, "The weight of evidence leads strongly toward a cardiovascular connection."

About 25 percent of adults age 40 and older are deficient in vitamin D, says Dr. Melamed. People who are at most risk include the elderly, women, darker-skinned individuals, those who don't spend much time in the sun and the overweight and obese. The current recommended daily intake is 200 to 400 I.U. for those up to age 70, and 600 I.U. for those over 70, but new studies may soon lead to higher recommended daily requirements for the vitamin.

Taking a supplement makes even more sense when you consider that sunscreen with SPF 15 reduces the skin's ability to make vitamin D by 99 percent, says Michael Holick, PhD, director of the Vitamin D, Skin and Bone Research Laboratory at Boston University Medical Center, and it's also very hard to get enough vitamin D through the diet, says Dr. Melamed.

The main sources are fish, such as salmon, sardines and shrimp; milk, eggs and certain fortified cereals.

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