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## **The Myths and Facts of Vitamin D and Sun Exposure**

**By Diana Clarke**

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Unverified reports claiming that unprotected, intentional sun exposure is necessary for Vitamin D formation are getting quite a bit of media coverage lately.

Yet, dermatologists still advise the public to practice sun protection to prevent skin cancer.

At a recent American Academy of Dermatology's Skin Cancer Detection and Prevention Month news conference, dermatologist Darrell S. Rigel, M.D., clinical professor, New York University Medical Center in New York City, debunked the myths surrounding Vitamin D and offered advice on getting an adequate dose of this nutrient.

"As a dermatologist who treats the ravages of skin cancer on a daily basis, it is appalling to me that anyone in good conscience could make the claim that intentional sun exposure - for any length of time - is beneficial," stated Dr. Rigel. "The fact is, skin cancer is increasing at an alarming rate and scientific research confirms that our best defense is avoiding excessive, unprotected sun exposure."

Dr. Rigel addressed the following myths about vitamin D and sun exposure:

**Myth #1 - Sunscreen blocks Ultraviolet (UV) light. Consequently, UV radiation is prevented from reaching the skin, which leads to an inadequate amount of vitamin D in the body.**

**Fact - A 1997 study published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute of patients with Xeroderma Pigmentosa (a disease that predisposes persons to skin cancer who are exposed to very low levels of ultraviolet radiation), showed that these patients have normal vitamin D levels despite negligible amounts of UV exposure.**

**Myth #2 -A considerable amount of UV exposure is necessary to maintain normal levels of vitamin D.**

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Fact - Normal vitamin D levels are maintained through a normal diet.

Myth #3 - Sunscreen does not allow UV radiation to reach the skin, so if people wear sunscreen, their bodies can form vitamin D.

Fact - Even the best sunscreen cannot block all UV radiation. But the amount that does hit the skin is enough to promote adequate vitamin D formation.

Myth #4 - Skin cancer is not a serious disease, so sun protection is not important.

Fact - One American dies every hour from melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer.

Myth #5 - Low levels of Vitamin D lead to more cancers and other diseases.

Fact - "There are no scientific studies that prove this statement," explained Dr. Rigel. "The claim is based on a study that finds that overall cancer rates are higher in the northeast United States, a location with lower sunlight levels than many other places in the country. Those making this claim conclude that since the northeast has lower UV levels, this is the reason why cancer rates are higher in this region. However, several studies prove this theory is false. These include studies that show that cancer rates are low in the northern plain states (areas with the lowest UV levels in the country) and small regional studies (New York state), where cancer rates are highest in areas with industrial pollutants and are not related to sunlight levels."

"When we take a close look at these myths and evaluate the facts, the course of action is clear," said Dr. Rigel. "Until there is science that tells us otherwise, it is imperative that people protect themselves from the sun. Anyone concerned about not getting enough vitamin D should either take a multivitamin or drink a few glasses of vitamin D–fortified milk every day. Given the fact that the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has declared UV radiation as a known carcinogen, exposing oneself to it for the sake of vitamin D is not the answer."

The American Academy of Dermatology advises everyone to engage in the following sun protective practices: avoid outdoor activities between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when the sun's rays are the strongest. seek shade whenever possible. wear a broad–spectrum sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15. reapply sunscreen every two hours. wear sun–protective clothing.

Diana Clarke is a teacher and the founder and editor of The Sun and Your Skin at

**Here Comes The Sun: And I Say It's Alright**

**By Laura Turner**

"Here comes the sun," the Beatles chorused. And as children most of us heeded the call enjoying long

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lazy days in the sun, laughing and cherishing time with friends. As we grew older, however, we were told the sun's rays were destructive; the ozone layer was near depletion. Soon many asked: "Why leave the house in the first place?"

Is it any wonder researchers are finding us vitamin D deficient (Ref. Harvard Health Letter 2006)? To understand why this is significant it is first important to inquire: What exactly does Vitamin D do? Yes, Vitamin D is necessary for strong bones and teeth, but what most don't know is it is key in reducing the risk of many types of cancer including breast, colon , prostate and ovarian (Ref. The American Journal Of Public Health).

Studies now conclude that 15 minutes in diffused sunlight can set off the metabolic process in skin which creates vitamin D. Yet before tanning yourself beyond recognition: use your head. This is not permission to stay in the sun for long periods as its aging qualities are still applicable. Limit yourself to 15 minutes and choose parts of the day when you are not in direct sunlight. You know, even on a cloudy day you are absorbing the sun's rays and it can also penetrate through clothing. Therefore, if you do choose to increase your exposure; use common sense.

If the sun or outdoor activities are not for you, there are other options to stock up on vitamin D as well. Salmon is rich with vitamin D, for example, as is milk. Or you could opt for cod–fish based supplements with vitamin D added. These additions to your diet are well worth your time and research. As always, do your homework and consult with your healthcare provider to choose a vitamin D option for you. Perhaps a healthy dose of fun in the sun will be just what the doctor ordered.

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