

The Sunny Side of Vitamin D

Athlete Scenerio

Last season, members of my college swim team and I had bone scans. Even though I drink milk, I was surprised that my bones were not as strong as they should be. My vitamin D level was checked and found to be low, at a level that could negatively affect my health and training. What are the benefits of having adequate vitamin D? How can I raise my vitamin D level?

Benefits of Adequate Vitamin D

- Promote bone health and muscle function
- Promote immune function
- Reduce exercise-related inflammation

Goals for Adequate Vitamin D

- Vitamin D status is determined by blood levels of 25-hydroxyvitamin D. Although optimal levels of vitamin D have not been established for athletes, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) has found that 20 ng/mL is the blood level needed for bone health for most individuals. Higher levels may be needed in order to promote immune function and reduce exercise-related inflammation.
- Expose your face, arms, and legs to the sun between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. (or artificial UVB radiation) for 10-25 minutes, 2-3 times per week. Since sunscreen will block vitamin D synthesis, do not apply sunscreen for this moderate exposure.
- Consume vitamin-D rich foods: salmon, tuna, sardines, egg yolks and vitamin D fortified foods: milk, soy milk, yogurt, cheese, margarine, orange juice, ready-to-eat cereals, mushrooms.
- Vitamin D supplementation may be needed if your blood level is low and especially during winter if you live in the northern half of the United States. Vitamin D cannot be made via sun exposure during winter in northern regions. The IOM considers 4,000 IU of vitamin D per day as the upper limit of dietary supplement intake considered to be safe for teens and adults.

Written by SCAN registered dietitians (RDs). The key to optimal meal planning for athletes is individualization. For personalized nutrition plans contact a SCAN sports dietitian or Board Certified Specialist in Sports Dietetics (CSSD) by accessing "Find a SCAN Dietitian" at www.scandpg.org | 800.249.2875.



Tips to Take With You

1. Consume vitamin D-rich foods and obtain safe sun exposure.
2. Have your vitamin D level assessed, preferably during the winter months.
3. If your vitamin D level is below the ideal, seek assistance of a sports dietitian or other qualified medical health professional to guide intervention. Recheck vitamin D status in three months.

Contact SCAN

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