

CANADIAN DERMATOLOGY ASSOCIATION POSITION STATEMENT SAFE AND EFFECTIVE WAY TO MAINTAIN ADEQUATE LEVELS OF VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin which is involved in calcium absorption, bone development and maintenance and control of cell growth. Canadians have two options to maintain vitamin D levels: oral intake and sun exposure. However, to obtain sufficient vitamin D levels, there is no need to increase sun exposure.

Oral vitamin D intake through vitamin supplements or diet is the optimal and safest way to maintain adequate levels. Vitamin D rich foods include oily fish such as salmon, trout, sardines, herring, mackerel, tuna, as well as cod liver oil, oysters, liver, and egg yolks. Vitamin D is also available in fortified foods such as some dairy products including milk, soy milk, as well as orange juice and cereals.

It is best not to rely on the incidental sun exposure that Canadians receive to maintain optimal vitamin D levels. It is safer all year round to eat foods high in vitamin D and take a vitamin D supplement.

Canadians should not plan to maintain adequate vitamin D levels through sun exposure due to the increased risk of developing skin cancer from ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Skin cancers, such as melanoma and squamous cell carcinoma, can be fatal. All forms of skin cancer require timely treatment, which can cause pain, scarring and disfigurement and sometimes death. Skin cancer affects approximately 1 in 6 Canadians and is largely preventable by limiting exposure to the sun, protecting the skin from UV radiation, and avoiding tanning beds. Sunscreen has been shown to prevent not only the premature aging of the skin but also skin cancers including melanoma, squamous cell carcinoma, and precancerous actinic keratoses.

Use of indoor tanning to promote vitamin D production increases a person's risk of developing skin cancer including melanoma. The Canadian Dermatology Association, Health Canada, and the World Health Organization, strongly discourage tanning bed use. The use of tanning beds is illegal for minors in most of Canada.

In summary: It is unsafe and unnecessary to increase sun exposure in order to maintain vitamin D levels.

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