

APPRECIATING VITAMIN D

What if I said I know of one treatment that could decrease your heart attack risk, reduce occurrences of type-1 diabetes by 80 percent, lower blood pressure, dramatically slow the progression of arthritis, reduce or eliminate muscle pain and prevent cancer – all without side effects?

Many people would ask, “What type of super drug could do all of that without side effects?” In fact, no drug could do all of those things, but maintaining adequate levels of one particular vitamin in the body has the potential for accomplishing such a list.

The vitamin I am referring to is vitamin D. Many of us are familiar with vitamin D and its role in calcium absorption and bone metabolism, but many doctors and patients are not aware of recent research that clearly shows its role in treating or preventing all of the things stated above.

Recently, after reading dozens of journal articles that showed the benefits of this nutrient, I started checking all of my patients for low levels of vitamin D through a blood test called 25-hydroxy-vitamin D. The normal range that the lab gives is 20 to 100 nanograms per milliliter (ng/ml) – a very large range that does not reflect a healthy range as identified in many of these recent studies.

According to the recent studies, the optimal range for this test is 40-65 ng/ml. To my surprise, the majority of patients that I checked fell well below this range. Vitamin D can be obtained naturally from two sources: sunlight and dietary consumption. I’m attributing these low levels to people avoiding the sun for fear of developing skin cancer, inadequate intake from the diet or a decreased ability to absorb vitamin D in the intestinal tract due to poor digestion.

An interesting point to ponder

is that vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin, and it is well known that patients who have had their gallbladders removed have a harder time digesting fat and absorbing the fat soluble vitamins D, A, E and K. Clinically I have noticed that my patients who have had their gallbladders removed have the lowest levels of vitamin D of all my patients tested.

Also, the recommended daily allowance for vitamin D is 200 to 400 IU per day. According to the research, however, that is far below the levels needed to keep blood levels in that optimal range. The research suggests doses up to 5,000 IU a day for several months are required for very deficient patients to achieve adequate blood levels.

The first study I came across had to do with vitamin D and the prevention of cardiovascular disease. In that study, researchers found the risk of heart attack is twice as high for those with vitamin D levels less than 34 ng/ml than for those with higher vitamin D levels. Another study showed that patients with congestive heart failure were found to have significantly lower levels of vitamin D than other patients. Those researchers also noted that vitamin D deficiency has been documented in numerous case reports as being a cause of heart failure.

A third study pertaining to cardiovascular health looked at patients suffering from high blood pressure who also had a vitamin D deficiency. They all saw significant reductions in their blood pressure after receiving doses of vitamin D that brought their blood levels into the optimal range.

Physicians often recommend vitamin D, along with calcium, as a way to treat and prevent osteoporosis, but they have also been shown to prevent and treat osteoarthritis. One study showed osteoarthritis

of the knee progressed more rapidly in those with vitamin D levels less than 36 ng/ml, while another showed osteoarthritis of the hip progressed more rapidly in those with levels less than 30. Another study showed patients with non-traumatic, persistent musculoskeletal pain – also commonly diagnosed as fibromyalgia – had an extremely high prevalence of overt vitamin D deficiency.

Many times, these patients are treated with pain relievers or anti-inflammatory drugs when all they may need is vitamin D.

In an impressive recent study, two researchers found vitamin D deficiency in 83 percent of their 299 patients with lower back pain. Doses of 5,000 to 10,000 IU per day – more than 20 times the RDA of vitamin D – led to pain reduction in nearly 100 percent of patients after three months.

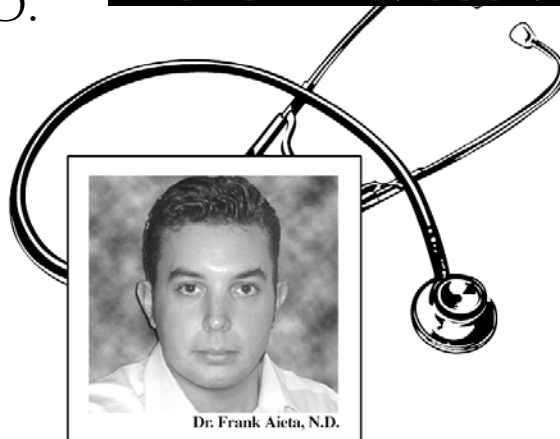
Type-1 diabetes is caused by an immune reaction where the pancreatic cells that produce insulin are destroyed. In a study with over 10,000 participants, supplementation in infants and children with 2,000 IU of vitamin D per day reduced the occurrence of type-1 diabetes by a shockingly high 80 percent. Even though this information is readily available, most pediatricians and parents, unfortunately, are not aware of it.

Low vitamin D levels are also linked to an increased risk for a variety of different cancers, depression, autoimmune diseases and migraines. According to the

research, most patients showed improvement in these conditions if a vitamin D deficiency was corrected through proper supplementation.

So if you are suffering from any of the conditions I spoke about – or are just looking to improve your health – have a doctor check your vitamin D levels, then seek the help of a licensed naturopathic physician to supplement you with the right form and proper dose of vitamin D. The dosages discussed above can only be prescribed by physicians, and blood levels should be monitored while supplementing.

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