Excellent Sources of Vitamin D

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Manage Your Osteoporosis With Vitamin D-Rich Foods

Calcium is crucial for healthy bones, but it's not the only factor in osteoporosis prevention. In fact, an array of natural compounds are needed to keep bones strong, and along with magnesium and protein, vitamin D is one of the most important.

Most vitamin D is produced in your skin cells, and transferred to your bones and muscles. However, as you age, your skin loses some of its ability to create vitamin D, which leaves your bones more vulnerable to damage and erosion — unless you make a conscious effort to up your intake.

There are three ways to get more vitamin D into your body: diet, sunshine and supplements. Each method has a part to play in an osteoporosis prevention or management plan, and it's important to use each appropriately. Learn how to modify your daily routine to get the vitamin D your bones need, without any adverse side effects that could harm your health in other ways.

How Vitamin D Helps your Bones

Bone and muscle health depends on the combination of different vitamins and minerals – no single compound will be able to protect any given system in your body. Without enough vitamin D, your bones won't be able to use the calcium you take in, and your level of parathyroid hormone will rise. The result? Calcium from your bones will leach out into your blood, leaving your skeleton thin and brittle and much more prone to fracture.

A higher dose of vitamin D can help your bones in two significant ways:

- **Calcium absorption**. Taking in a sufficient amount of calcium is important, but you must make sure your body can absorb it. Vitamin D helps your intestines absorb calcium better, so your bones can use more of it.
- **Muscle function**. Muscles depend on vitamin D for strength and efficiency, and stronger muscles mean better support for your bones (which is especially important when you've lost bone density).

The Benefits of a Vitamin D Supplement

Although vitamin D supplementation can't guarantee bone health for life, the vitamin's strengthening effects are no small matter: studies have found that older people who supplement with vitamin D are less likely to lose their balance, fall, or have difficulties standing or stepping up.

Experts suggest that combining a calcium supplement with a vitamin D supplement can reduce the risk of hip fractures – a common (and dangerous) consequence of osteoporosis. Doctors recommend that postmenopausal women with osteoporosis take in 1200 mg of calcium and 800 iu of vitamin D each day, while men and premenopausal women with osteoporosis get 1000 mg of calcium and 600 iu of vitamin D daily.

Before you add a supplement to your diet, check your other medications and vitamins – some may already include a dose of vitamin D, so you'll have to tailor your intake accordingly. Since vitamin D works closely with calcium, you'll need to take in enough of both, but you don't necessarily need to take them at the same time. Ask your doctor how best to fit your vitamin D into your existing routine.

Next page: dietary sources, and using sunshine to your advantage.

Dietary Sources of Vitamin D

Supplements are important because vitamin D is generally rather scarce in nature, but there are ways to get more into your diet so you can improve your bone health the natural way, too:

- Salmon (511 iu in a 4 ounce serving)
- Sardines (175 iu in a 3.2 ounce serving)
- Tuna (93 iu in a 4 ounce serving)
- Milk (62 iu in a 4 ounce serving)
- Eggs (43 iu in one egg)
- Mushrooms (20 iu in a half cup serving)

If you're not able to squeeze lots of fish and dairy into your daily menu, look for foods and beverages that have been fortified with vitamin D. Orange juice and yogurt are the most common examples, though more cereals are being fortified with vitamin D these days, too.

Using Sunshine to Your Advantage

When it comes to vitamin D, the sun is your closest ally. During sun exposure, your skin takes in the ultraviolet light and converts it to vitamin D, storing it for later use. Different bodies use the sunlight differently, and your particular ability to produce vitamin D will depend on factors like your skin pigmentation, where you live, and the time of the season.

For many people, just 10 to 15 minutes of direct sunlight is enough to replenish their vitamin D stores. However, the problem is that skin cancer prevention measures interfere with ultraviolet light absorption: clothing will block UVB rays from reaching your body, and an SPF factor as low as 8 will reduce your skin's vitamin D production by up to 95%.

A few minutes of unprotected sun exposure can give your skin the ingredients it needs to make vitamin D, but you likely can't rely on sunshine alone. Talk to your doctor about supplementing with a vitamin D pill, or a natural compound like cod liver oil. Ultimately, the more varied your approach, the more likely you'll see a significant improvement in your strength, stability, and bone density for years to come.