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SMART TAN MEMBERS APRIL 2006

More good news this month about Vitamin D - made naturally when skin is exposed to UVB from sunlight or from a tanning bed!

Members of the growing Vitamin D research community made their most credible and substantial case to date in Toronto March 8 at the North American Conference on UV, Vitamin D and Health. The conference, hosted by the Canadian Cancer Society in partnership with an international collection of public health agencies, included presentations from groups warning about the risks associated with UV exposure, but quickly turned into a slam dunk for the often-understated vitamin D message.

Armed with new research - which as recently as five years ago garnered little attention in the scientific community - Vitamin D advocates took center stage by underscoring the following findings: Because of the northerly latitudes, most Canadians and most Americans living in the northern United States are either vitamin D deficient or are at risk for vitamin D deficiency.

The recommended daily intake of vitamin D for Americans and Canadians - long set at 200-400 international units (IU) - is woefully inadequate. The most aggressive researchers now suggest that levels from 1,000 IU to 10,000 IU - more consistent with levels one would receive by exposing skin to sunlight - may be warranted to properly elevate blood levels of the vitamin.

Old concerns about vitamin D toxicity associated with higher levels of supplementation may be inaccurate - a finding that, if validated, would pave the way for higher supplementation recommendations. At higher levels, it may be impossible to achieve proper vitamin D fortification through diet and supplements alone - a possibility suggested by both vitamin D researchers and dietary science specialists at the conference.

Old public health suggestions that people only need 5-10 minutes of sun exposure to their hands and face to make adequate vitamin D may be far from accurate. For a fair-skinned individual it may take 10-15 minutes of full-body sun exposure to make sufficient vitamin D, and that time period may increase up to 10-fold for a person with Skin Type V or VI, whose skin naturally filters sunlight.

Public health experts, quoted in the Canadian press in the days following the conference, already are hedging their bets, backing away from absolute "stay out of the sun" statements, acknowledging that some sun may be necessary or the public risks vitamin D deficiency.

More research is needed to solidify all of these findings, but it seems clear that old-guard recommendations regarding vitamin D fortification and sun avoidance are no longer on solid ground.

What's different now? More researchers are stepping up, challenging the old guard dermatologic dogma. The Vitamin D message has many voices now.

Recall, in the non-so-distant-past Dr. Michael Holick stood out as the mouthpiece for the Vitamin D message. While many others were doing vitamin D research, Holick stood out as the first to challenge the political correctness of the dermatology message and cry out publicly that vitamin D deficiency was a huge public health problem, and that UV exposure is the natural way to make vitamin D.



Others are carrying that torch today. Indeed, Holick wasn't even at this meeting. But in attendance were several new faces of the vitamin D message:

- Dr. Reinhold Vieth, a noted vitamin D expert and advocate from the Department of Nutritional Sciences and the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathology at the University of Toronto.
- Dr. Bruce Hollis, professor of Pediatrics, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology at the Medical University of South Carolina.
- Dr. Edward Giovannucci, of the department of Nutrition and Epidemiology at the Harvard School of Public Health.
- Dr. David Hanley, an expert in calcium regulation at the University of Calgary Department of Medicine.
- Dr. Terry Dwyer, of the Murdoch Children's Research Institute in Melbourne, Australia.
- Dr. Mona Calvo, a nutritional sciences expert with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.
- Dr. Susan Whiting, a professor of nutrition at the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition at the University of Saskatchewan.

The conference - hosted by the Canadian Cancer Society - was also sponsored by the American Cancer Society, the Canadian Dermatology Association, the National Cancer Institute of Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the World Health Organization's Collaborative Centre for the Promotion of Sun Protection.