



An hour of sun meets our Vitamin D needs

You can't get enough of the sun, literally. Four in five Indians are deficit in Vitamin D, a vitamin synthesised by the skin when exposed to sunlight. An hour of sunlight is all that your body needs to meet its Vitamin D requirements. Just 10-20 per cent of this vitamin comes from food, yet 96 per cent newborns, 91 per cent healthy schoolgirls, 78 per cent hospital staff and 84 per cent pregnant women in India have low levels of this vitamin.

Not surprisingly, deficiency of the sunshine vitamin is higher in city folks, who spend their day in artificial light than people in semi-urban areas and villages. Add to this the Indian obsession with fairness that makes sunshades, scarves and flowing clothes essential summer wardrobe and you have a nation starved of an essential vitamin that is available absolutely free. Vitamin D maintains normal blood levels of calcium and phosphorus and also helps make bones strong by helping in calcium absorption and preventing osteoporosis.

New research suggests the sunshine vitamin also prevents high blood pressure, diabetes, some cancers and autoimmune diseases such as multiple sclerosis. The deficiency of this vitamin in pregnant women is particularly worrying as children whose mum's get plenty of Vitamin D during pregnancy have bigger, stronger bones by the age of 9. In fact, this US study shows that the mother's high vitamin D levels strengthen bones more than the milk children drink in those first nine years.

Food sources of Vitamin D are egg yolk, butter, cheese, cod liver oil and other fish liver oils.

According to the World Health Organisation, one in two women and one in three men in India over the age of 50, have low bone mass, which can lead to debilitating fractures in later life. Globally, the figures are one in four women and one in five men over 50 years.

You build maximum bone tissue in your teens and twenties, with physi-



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cally active teens gaining almost 40 per cent more bone mass than the least active teens. Maximum bone development taking place between 11 and 19 years, but it is increasingly getting compromised with young people spending long hours hunched over computers and yo-yoing between starving or overdosing on junk food.

So common is the deficiency of the sunshine vitamin that a standard dose of Vitamin D — available in calcium tablets (250 international units or IU per 500 mg calcium carbonate) — is not enough to achieve recommended levels, found study of health, post-menopausal women in India by Dr Ambrish Mithal and presented to the International Osteoporosis Foundation earlier this year. His study recommends women over 50 years have a higher daily dose of Vitamin D supplementation — 1,000 IU/day (500 IU per 500 mg calcium carbonate) — to maintain optimum bone health.

Vitamin D supplementation apart, a diet rich in calcium — found in broccoli, cabbage, salmon, canned sardines, almonds, dried beans — brings down fracture risk. People over 50 years who were agile are less likely to have fractures than non-agile people. it's time you get moving, in the sun preferably.