

Have you ever noticed that you seem to get cold's more easily during winter?



What if I told you that you could avoid getting sick this winter with just a little bit of sunshine?

Vitamin D, which is absorbed through the skin from UV rays, is an essential hormone that controls calcium levels in the blood. Our bodies use the Vitamin D for healthy bones, muscles and general health.

The reason we tend to get more colds during winter isn't the cold weather as such but the reduction to our immune system and part of that is controlled with Vitamin D. I'm looking out my window today writing this and am looking at some pretty grey skies and not all that appealing for a bit of outdoor time but I know that if i don't spend at least 15-20 minutes outside in the 'sunshine' then I won't get the vitamin D i require for my body to stay healthy and strong and I will start feeling a little flat.

In the past 10 years our lives have changed dramatically with the advancements of technology – iPhones, iPads, T-hubs, Wii etc our lives are now run by technology which stops us spending more time outside, which is why there has been such a spike in recent years for young people with Vitamin D deficiency.

Vitamin D deficiency usually presents itself in older adults who are either housebound, living in aged-care facilities or who have mobility issues and don't get out as much, however with the increase in technology even children are now being diagnosed with it due to an increased amount of time spent indoors instead of outside in the fresh air and sunshine.

Others who may suffer from Vitamin D deficiency include:

- People who wear concealing clothing for religious and cultural purpose
- People who deliberately avoid sun exposure for cosmetic or health reasons
- People at risk of skin cancers
- People who are in hospital for long periods
- People with a disability or chronic disease
- People in occupations with little sun exposure such as taxi drivers, factory workers or night-shift workers.

Our immune system relies heavily on our T cells (the cells that fight infection) and Vitamin D is an important ingredient in helping these T cells stay strong and continue to fight infections in our body.

Vitamin D deficiency has also been linked to asthma exacerbations, skin allergies such as psoriasis and eczema, fatigue, colds/flu, osteoporosis, diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, depression, body muscle mass wasting, gum disease and certain cancers.

There is also research currently underway determining whether Vitamin D deficiency has something to do with early onset of Alzheimer's.

While not everyone will suffer from Vitamin D deficiency, people with naturally dark skin, people with little or no sun exposure, breastfed babies (only an issue if mother is vitamin D deficient while breastfeeding), people with conditions or medications that affect the absorption of vitamin D including obesity, end-stage liver disease, kidney disease, cystic fibrosis, celiac disease and some autoimmune suppressant drugs.

We can get Vitamin D in some foods naturally such as fish, eggs and dairy, however we sometimes need the assistance of a tablet or just some good old fashioned sunshine.

So starting today here are some tips to getting out of bed and back onto the road to health:

- Spend 15-20 minutes each day outside in the sun (without sunscreen) between 10am-3pm – this is when the UV is at its strongest throughout winter.
- The old saying an apple a day will keep the doctor away should be adjusted to 15 minutes of sunshine a day will keep the doctor away – get out there and get your skin some sunshine.
- Spend some time in your garden or in the park with your kids, go for a run, anything that allows you to roll up your sleeves (even just for a little while) so that your body can get the Vitamin D it needs to look after your body.
- Winter blues and Vitamin D go hand in hand – we spend more time indoors during winter and this leads to our vitamin D levels dropping so if you are feeling a bit blue try some sunshine to boost your spirits.
- Include plenty of fish, eggs, dairy into your diet to boost those vitamin D levels

And if you think you are Vitamin D deficient ask your doctor about getting a blood test to check your levels.

Let's beat those winter blues and bounce into spring.

Yours' in women's health and fitness,

Katrina

P.S. I'm off for my lunch walk now before the sun runs away!!