

Diet

Vitamin D and Prostate Cancer

There is growing evidence that Vitamin D deficiency is associated with a number of diseases including prostate cancer. Known as the 'sunshine vitamin' because the body can make all it needs with enough sunlight, Vitamin D is synthesised in the skin after exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays.

We already know the body needs Vitamin D, along with other minerals, for building strong bones and healthy teeth. More recent studies are indicating its role in maintaining a healthy immune system and controlling cell growth, both of which are important in preventing cancer.

In the UK there is considerable Vitamin D deficiency, most noticeably in those with darker skin. Increased skin melanin (pigment) protects the body from damage from the sun's ultraviolet rays in countries where sun exposure is high all year round. In countries with low sunlight dark-skinned people are at a disadvantage as it takes them 2 hours of sun exposure to synthesise what a lighter skinned person produces in 20 minutes.

Professor Tim Oliver, co-founder of Orchid says "We have been trying to secure funding for a chemo-prevention study of Vitamin D supplementation in African-Caribbeans. This group's increased susceptibility to prostate cancer is well established, as is the evidence that there is increased risk of prostate cancer from lifelong Vitamin D deficiency."

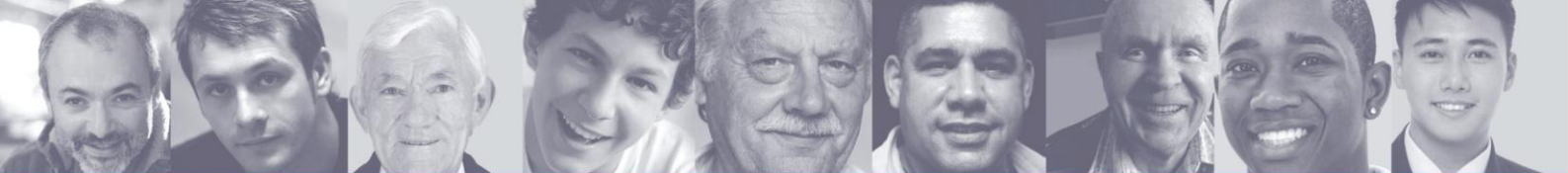
Recent studies have suggested a positive correlation between Vitamin D deficiency and prostate cancer growth as well as breast, colon, bowel, skin and pancreatic cancers, osteoporosis, osteomalacia, diabetes, heart disease, SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), infertility, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis and obesity.

Winter sunlight is not strong enough to produce sufficient Vitamin D but, provided adequate exposure has occurred during the summer months, the body usually manages to store enough to carry us through the winter months – although this is one reason why coughs and colds are most prevalent in January and February when Vitamin D levels are at their lowest.

Foods high in Vitamin D include wild oily fish such as mackerel, herring, kippers, salmon, sardines, tuna, halibut, cod liver oil, egg yolk, sprouted seeds, some mushrooms and fortified breakfast cereals.

Orchid has long advocated the importance of exercise and a healthy lifestyle as a means of preventing male specific cancers.

Eating fish 3 times a week throughout the year and getting 10-20 minutes of sunlight in total a day, between 10am and 2pm without sunscreen*, in the summer months should provide the body with enough vitamin D to meet RDA levels (government approved minimum daily recommended dietary allowances).



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Those over the age of 65 or with darker skin pigmentation need to sensibly increase this exposure, while those with especially fair skin may need no more than the minimum.

*Please note that longer exposure to the sun during the summer months without sunscreen protection could lead to sunburn and skin cancer. The body will not produce more Vitamin D than it needs and in fact cuts off making Vitamin D after more than 15 minutes continuous exposure.

Further information:

We all know the importance of eating a varied and balanced diet. Your GP or healthcare professional can offer you advice and guidance on healthy eating and nutrition. Medical advice before supplementation is advised and should be taken as part of a balanced diet.

For information and support on diet and male cancers please visit the Orchid website at www.orchid-cancer.org.uk

You might also want to visit the following websites:

www.5aday.nhs.uk

This website from the Department of Health provides tips on how to include five portions of fruit and vegetables in your daily diet.

www.bda.uk.com

The British Dietetic Association offers information on finding a state registered dietitian and following a healthy diet.

www.wcrf-uk.org

World Cancer Research Fund offers information on cancer and diet.

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