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65-70% Indians are Vitamin D deficient. Here's why you should worry

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*65-70% Indians are Vitamin D deficient. Here's why you should worry
(Yuichiro Chino/Getty Images)*

Despite plentiful sun, Vitamin D (aka sunshine vitamin) deficiency is reaching epidemic proportions in India, warns Dr Michael Holick, Endocrinologist and global authority on Vitamin D therapy.

Recent studies have revealed that 65-70 per cent Indians are Vitamin D deficient and another 15 per cent are insufficient. Wondering what's all the fuss about? For starters, Vitamin D is not a simple vitamin. It is a steroid hormone that impacts virtually every cell in the body. It is synthesized in the skin on exposure to sunshine and is needed to absorb calcium and for bone health.

Low vitamin D levels are widely known to harm bones, leading them to become thin, brittle, soft or misshapen. But Vitamin D is equally important for heart, brain, immune function and much more. If not managed properly, there are high chances that it can lead to rickets, osteoporosis, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer and infections such as tuberculosis. "It is also observed that high level of Vitamin D deficiency increases the risk of diabetes, coronary heart disease, hypertension and other cardiovascular diseases," adds Dr Holick. He spoke on 'Recent Advancements in Vitamin D Therapy Management' at the international speaker program, organised by Cadila Pharmaceuticals Ltd in New Delhi. Studies have shown that among the patients experiencing musculoskeletal pain, 93% of them were Vitamin D deficient.

For the uninitiated, there are two kinds of Vitamin D. Vitamin D2 ergocalciferol is found in food items and Vitamin D3 cholecalciferol is made in your body with the presence of sunlight. While both are extremely important for us, if we get D2 from

food, even little exposure to sun can help the body produce D3.

Major General (Retd) Dr Raman K Marwaha, Eminent Endocrinologist, Former Additional Director and Head (INMAS) and President, Indian Society for Bone and Mineral Research (ISBMR), "We have undertaken two major studies involving Indian children in the age group of 11-15 years, which were published in Osteoporosis International and British Journal of Dermatology. It was found that despite exposure to sun for 30 minutes every day for 30 days during summer and winter, it did not achieve the level of Vitamin D, which is considered to be adequate for sound bone health. And that is the reason why I feel that it is important to supplement Vitamin D in Indian conditions during summer, especially in winter to achieve adequate levels of Vitamin D."

Sources of Vitamin D

Sunlight: It goes without saying that exposure to sunlight in the morning or mid evening can help with your daily intake of Vitamin D3.

Cod liver oil: This oil comes from the liver of the cod fish and is considered extremely healthy. It helps ease joint pains and can be taken in capsule form or oil form.

Mushrooms: If you love mushrooms, you are covered. Dried shitake mushrooms are a brilliant source of Vitamin D3 as well as Vitamin B. It is low in calorie and can be consumed daily.

Salmon: Salmon is another good source of D3, Omega 3 and protein.

Sunflowers seeds: This seed not only have Vitamin D3 but also comes with monounsaturated fats and protein.

Lack of sun exposure not only causes Vitamin D deficiency but can also make you SAD, literally. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) happens mostly during monsoon and winter when sun exposure is at its minimum. It makes you feel low and lethargic.

Facts to know

Dr Geeta Dharmatti, Chief Nutrigenomic Counselor, GeneSupport points out important tips to enhance Vitamin D absorption: ·
Daily 15-20 min sunlight exposure may not give adequate vitamin but it is a healthy way of including it in a daily lifestyle

- Fat is the culprit for vitamin d absorption. Minimise fat for better absorption
- Food sources are few like egg yolk, milk and fishes salmon but do not give enough vitamin D
- Healthy weight with regular monitoring and supplementing helps
- Genetic assessment of Vitamin D absorption can be done and the supplementation can be started at an early stage