

VITAMIN D AND FLU PREVENTION

Staying Healthy with Dr. Aieta, N.D.

Not too long ago, I wrote a Sports Journal piece titled "A Natural Take on Flu Season" in which I highlighted a variety of natural prevention tips and treatments for the flu. This year, after reading a recent paper by John Jacob Cannell, executive director of the Vitamin D Council, I have one more piece to add to the list of evidence linking epidemic influenza outbreaks with vitamin D deficiency.

Cannell writes about how influenza all but disappears during the summer months when ultraviolet exposure is at its maximum. He talks about how, even if people are exposed to the flu during the summer, they are less likely to fall ill. People injected with attenuated flu virus in the winter are eight times more likely to develop a fever than if the experiment is conducted in the summer. Cannell goes on to say that it's not that the germ is stronger in the winter, but that the immune system is weaker. Vitamin D, we now understand, is essential for the immune system to fight infection. When vitamin-D levels are low, people are more susceptible to infection.

Ultraviolet light triggers vitamin D

production in the skin. During the winter months, when UV light levels decline, vitamin D production decreases to the degree that a high percentage of the population will, at least, temporarily become deficient. The elderly, obese and those with darker skin are at highest risk for deficiency and, therefore, at a higher risk of developing viral infections.

In my practice, every patient I see gets screened for vitamin D deficiency regardless of time of year, and I will supplement with adequate doses until their levels are optimal. According to Cannell, a dose of 5,000 IU per day during the winter months is needed to maintain adequate levels of vitamin D and prevent the flu. This is a high dose in comparison to the National Academy of Science's recommended daily allowance (RDA) of 200-400 IU. High dose vitamin D supplementation should always be monitored by a physician to avoid toxicity.

I will routinely run a blood test every two to three months, monitoring my patients' 25-hydroxy-vitamin D levels. Many times optimal range of vitamin D can only



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be achieved with higher doses, especially if the initial reading is extremely low, which is common during the winter months. So, if you are looking for other ways to prevent the flu and stay healthy, make an appointment with a naturopathic physician to have your vitamin D levels checked and treated if you are deficient.

For more information on the benefits of vitamin D, check out my article in the September 2005 issue of the Western Mass Sports Journal, or read it on my Web site at www.DrAieta.com.

Dr. Frank Aieta is a board-certified and licensed Naturopathic Physician with a private practice in West Hartford, Conn. He specializes in the treatment of disease, using natural therapies such as acupuncture, homeopathy, spinal manipulation, clinical nutrition, and herbal medicine. If there is a specific topic you would like to see addressed in an upcoming column, you can e-mail him at DrAieta@aol.com, or visit www.DrAieta.com for additional information.

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