Canadian pediatricians recommend more vitamin D for pregnant, nursing women

▸▸ Pregnant women and nursing mothers should talk to their doctors about getting 2,000 international units of vitamin D, the Canadian Pediatric Society said recently.

The vitamin D intake mentioned by the pediatricians' group is significantly higher than Health Canada's current recommendation of 200 IUs for adults 19 to 50 years of age, which includes pregnant and lactating women.

Vitamin D deficiency can pose serious dangers to the development of a fetus and infant, yet can be prevented through taking supplements, the society argues.

"There are lots of studies that suggest that a lot of mothers, particularly aboriginal mothers in the north, have been vitamin D deficient," Dr. John Godel, principal author of the Canadian Pediatric Society's statement, said. "And this means that the breast milk that they have is also deficient."

It's the latest call by a major health or medical organization for Canadians to boost their intake of vitamin D. In June, the Canadian Cancer Society caused a stir when it suggested that adults try to get 1,000 IUs daily during fall and winter, while darker-skinned and older people should think about taking it year-round.

Health Canada noted that it's aware of the growing body of evidence on the role of vitamin D in relation to health. But it also reminded Canadians that there are health risks associated with taking too much vitamin D and they should not exceed 2,000 IUs per day.

Carol Wagner, a professor of pediatrics at the Medical University of South Carolina, is among those conducting research on vitamin D deficiency. She has been studying pregnant women for about four years and lactating women since 2001.

"We care about vitamin D because it's not just about bones," Wagner said. "It's about your innate immune system, your ability to fight infections, long latency diseases such as multiple sclerosis and cancers, all sorts of things like that. And to go through a pregnancy and be insufficient is really, I think, not the way to have a pregnancy progress."

The Canadian Paediatric Society repeated its urging that babies who are exclusively breastfed receive a supplement of 400 IUs a day, and that babies in the north, above 55 degrees latitude, should get twice that recommended amount from October to April. ◂◂

– From The Canadian Press

Vitamin D sets you on the path to a longer life

▸▸ Vitamin D is best known for building strong bones, but it may have another benefit: longevity.

In a recent analysis of more than 18 studies involving nearly 60,000 people, those who took vitamin D supplements had a 7-percent reduction in mortality from all causes compared to those who didn't take the vitamin.

"The results are remarkable," noted Edward Giovannucci of the Harvard School of Public Health in an editorial published in the Archives of Internal Medicine, where the study also appeared.

These new findings add to the growing interest in vitamin D - often dubbed the "sunshine vitamin" because the skin needs the sun's ultraviolet rays to make it.

Vitamin D is crucial for immunity. It prompts the production of antimicrobial substances that seem to act as natural antibiotics and antiviral agents. Some experts think that the reduced sun exposure during winter months could help account for the seasonal ebb and flow of colds and influenza.

Emerging research also points to a role for vitamin D in cancer prevention, particularly against breast, colon, prostate and lung tumors.

Another possible benefit of vitamin D is prevention of Type 2 diabetes, which affects an estimated 17 million Americans.

So how could one vitamin have so many potentially wide-ranging effects? Unlike other vitamins, D acts both as a vitamin and as a hormone that can be activated as needed by the body.

To cover the bases, here's how you can make sure you get enough vitamin D:

-- Eat salmon or mackerel. Just 3.5 ounces of either provides 90 percent of the daily value for vitamin D.

-- Grab a few rays. Just 20 minutes of sun exposure without sunscreen enables the skin to produce about 20,000 IU of vitamin D. ◂◂

– From bostonherald.com