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Canadian Groups Taking the Lead on Vitamin D

BY JOSEPH LEVY

▸▸A Canadian physicians group is calling for pregnant and nursing mothers to talk with their doctors about getting 2,000 international units of vitamin D daily – the highest recommendation yet by any physicians group.

The Canadian Pediatric Society - in boldly making that proclamation in September – now joins the Canadian Cancer Society, which this summer jumped ahead in vitamin D advocacy by recommending that everyone get 1,000 international units of vitamin D daily.

Current global recommendations range between 200 and 600 IU – levels that the entire vitamin D community now agrees are woefully inadequate, but which most groups are reluctant to change because no one knows for sure how high the number should go.

So it isn't a matter of whether or not the D recommendations should be changed. It's simply that no one knows what they need to be. In the meantime, consumers are caught in the middle as the victims.

And that's a pity. An estimated 97 percent of Canadians are vitamin D deficient in the winter – no doubt related to Canada's northerly latitude and relatively weak sunlight. Because UVB in sunlight is responsible for natural vitamin D production in the skin, the northern sun in Canada is too weak four to six months of the year to produce any vitamin D.

Americans aren't much better off either. More than half of Americans likely are vitamin D deficient at some point in the year – and that's by the old, lower definitions of vitamin D sufficiency.

"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 of the CPS told The Canadian Press in September. "And this means that the breast milk they have is also deficient."

It's not rocket science to figure this out – the math is relatively simple. Dr. Reinhold Vieth, perhaps Canada's premiere vitamin D authority, has shown that people who work outdoors in regular sunlight have vitamin D levels higher than those who take 4,000 IU of vitamin D daily.

Sunlight is the best source of vitamin D. It's the most natural source of vitamin D. It is the most abundant source of vitamin D. And it is the cheapest source of vitamin D.

Health Canada – Canada's version of the Department of Health and Human Services in the United States – has called the push for higher D recommendations "premature" saying that a comprehensive review of the safety of higher D supplementation needs to be conducted before new recommendations can be made.

It's just a case where bureaucracy is incapable of seeing the forest for the trees. Natural, intended vitamin D levels are no doubt what humans would get if they lived and worked outdoors. And there's no way to get there naturally without regular sun exposure.◂◂

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