Sunlight: Nature's Most Potent Cancer Fighter?

If health officials would simply recommend that you get some sensible sun exposure, or supplement with oral vitamin D3 if you can't get out into the sun, there could be major advances made in the fight against cancer.

In short, your risk of cancer could be cut in half. This is according to a large-scale, randomized, placebo-controlled study that looked at almost 1,200 women, aged 55 and older, over the course of four years.

Those in a group that was given supplemental calcium and vitamin D had a 60 percent lower risk for all cancers than those who received a placebo.

Other research conducted by Dr. Grant found that about 30 percent of cancer deaths -- which amounts to 2 million worldwide and 200,000 in the United States -- could be prevented each year with higher levels of vitamin D.

Vitamin D has a protective effect against cancer in several ways, including:

• Increasing the self-destruction of mutated cells (which, if allowed to replicate, could lead to cancer)
• Reducing the spread and reproduction of cancer cells
• Causing cells to become differentiated (cancer cells often lack differentiation)
• Reducing the growth of new blood vessels from pre-existing ones, which is a step in the transition of dormant tumors turning cancerous

And for those who already have cancer, I believe it is virtually criminal malpractice, or at least gross medical negligence, to not optimize vitamin D levels when treating someone with this disease. As Dr. Grant wrote in his article:

"From a scientific point of view, vitamin D reduces the risk of developing many types of cancer and increases survival once cancer reaches the detectable stage."

You Don't Have to Wait for a Change in Health Policy

Making sure that your vitamin D levels are optimized is one of the simplest, yet most profound, things you can do to protect your health. It will likely be many decades before health policy catches up to what the evidence has already revealed, and widespread recommendations for increased sunlight exposure and vitamin D levels become the norm.

But you don't have to wait, as you can optimize your levels right now.

The ideal way to optimize your vitamin D level is by exposing your skin to appropriate amounts of sunlight on large areas of your skin. Unfortunately for most of us there simply isn't enough sun exposure for nearly half of the year.

However, even when the sun is shining many of us are modern-day cavemen and spend the majority of the day inside at work or in our home. Not many of us are regularly out in the sun.

You typically need enough exposure to turn your skin the lightest shade of pink. If you have enough skin exposed you will produce about 20,000 units of vitamin D. Exposures any longer than turning your skin the lightest pink will not produce any additional vitamin D and potentially lead to premature skin aging and increase your risk of skin cancers.

Most of us struggle with vitamin D winters in which we may not be able to get enough sun exposure during certain parts of the year. In that case, I also advise using a safe tanning bed (one that has the harmful emissions shielded) to have your own body produce vitamin D naturally.

A third option is taking a high-quality vitamin D supplement. The most important thing to keep in mind if you opt for oral supplementation is that you only want to supplement with natural vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol), which is human vitamin D. Do NOT use the synthetic and highly inferior vitamin D2.

For those in the winter with no or very limited exposure to sunshine, 4,000-5,000 units per day is appropriate for most adults. If you are very heavy you may need to double that dose, and for children the dose can be half that.

When supplementing, make sure you have your levels monitored to make sure your levels are in the therapeutic range. If you live in the U.S. please be sure and use Lab Corp. Quest labs is not as accurate and you will likely need to multiply your results by 0.6 to give you a more accurate measurement of your true vitamin D levels.

If you are under the impression that your vitamin D levels are probably fine as they are, I have to warn you that vitamin D deficiency is pandemic in the United States. In fact, the late winter average vitamin D in the U.S. is only about 15-18 ng/ml, which is considered a very serious deficiency state. Meanwhile, it's thought that over 95 percent of U.S. senior citizens may be deficient, along with 85 percent of the American public.

Making sure that you implement the simple steps necessary to optimize your vitamin D levels is therefore of crucial importance for your own, and your family's, health.