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## HEALTH / NUTRITION

# Vitamin D delivers multiple benefits

## It may help lower risk of cancer, kidney disease

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Vitamin D may not just be good for you, it may help save your life.

Recent research from Johns Hopkins University suggests that higher amounts of vitamin D in your diet decreases your likelihood of dying. Studies found that a vitamin D deficiency increases your risk of death by 26 percent, and vitamin D decreases the mortality rate from almost every type of cancer including breast, colon and prostate. Research also suggests that vitamin D helps prevent diabetes, kidney disease and cardiovascular disease.

Surprising news for some, but not for Atlanta physician Reginald Fowler.

The doctor of internal medicine found that 80 percent of his patients lacked the crucial vitamin that maintains normal blood levels of calcium and phosphorus in the body.

"It's nothing new, but if we can do something about it, we will decrease the incidence of disease significantly," said Fowler, who regularly screens for vitamin D during exams. A simple blood test can check for levels that should remain at 30 (nanograms per milliliter) or above.

People who are deficient in vitamin D may experience muscle pain or a feeling of achiness. Severe and long-term deficiency of vitamin D leads to rickets, a softening or weakening of the bones.

The sun helps the body produce vitamin D, but too much time in direct sunlight can increase the risk of skin cancer. So food and supplements are generally deemed the best sources.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture recommends an intake value of 200 International Units per day for people up to age 50, but Fowler and other health officials recommend at least double that amount.

To increase your intake, eat more vitamin D-rich foods such as salmon and tuna, fortified cereals, nuts, orange juice and dairy products. An 8-ounce glass of fortified milk contains about 100 IUs of vitamin D. You can also take a vitamin D-3 supplement such as cholecalciferol.

“This is not something to play around with,” Fowler said. “These are little changes that can make a huge impact.”

## **A SUNNIER DIET**

Foods that are rich in vitamin D include dairy products (make sure they are made from vitamin D-fortified milk), fortified cereals, salmon, tuna, mackerel, orange juice and nuts such as walnuts and almonds. Some examples:

- Cod liver oil, 1 tablespoon: 1,360 International Units
- Salmon, cooked, 3 1/2 ounces: 360 IUs
- Mackerel, cooked, 3 1/2 ounces: 345 IUs
- Sardines, canned in oil, drained, 3 1/2 ounces: 270 IUs
- Milk (nonfat, reduced fat and whole) vitamin D-fortified, 1 cup: 98 IUs
- Margarine, fortified, 1 tablespoon: 60 IUs
- Pudding, 1/2 cup prepared from mix and made with vitamin D-fortified milk: 50 IUs
- Dry cereal, vitamin D-fortified, 3/4 cup: 40-50 IUs
- Liver, beef, cooked, 3 1/2 ounces: 30 IUs
- 1 egg (vitamin D is present in the yolk): 25 IUs