European Sunlight Association

Better to rely on sunshine than pills to avoid Vitamin D deficiency

Brussels, 22 March 2017 - A new scientific study has found Vitamin D pills to have a positive effect on health. Yet moderate exposure to sunlight, either indoor or outdoor, is a more natural and efficient way to avoid Vitamin D deficiency and protect the immune system.

Today, there is increasing attention brought to the risks associated with Vitamin D deficiency which affects a large part of the European population, especially at northern latitudes. Indeed, some of us get too little of UV exposure, depending on our living or working environment and location. This cannot be fully offset by taking Vitamin D supplements.

Frank Harbusch, Secretary General of the European Sunlight Association (ESA), said: "There is nothing new in finding that Vitamin D improves health conditions. However, pills and dietary supplements are not as efficient as the body naturally producing its own Vitamin D from sunlight. It is not by chance that Vitamin D is called "the Sunshine Vitamin".

While dietary supplements obviously have a place in some people dietary intake, they remain unnatural to the body and are therefore not stored by the body. In contrast, exposure to sunlight – either outdoor or on a sunbed – allows your body to naturally synthesise Vitamin D. A sunbed produces Vitamin D of exactly the same quality and properties as the sun itself while allowing you to keep control of your exposure.

Supplements are hard to dose; people can easily take too many or too few. Depending on the diet and on other supplements or medication people use, there could also be undesired effects. On the other hand, when Vitamin D is produced through exposure to sunlight, outdoors or on a sunbed, the body produces exactly the amount needed. Sunbeds do not present risks if you observe just one simple rule: beware of over-exposure.

Recent studies have demonstrated the positive effects of UV-B induced vitamin D on bone health, and the fact that controlled but regular UV exposure lowers the risk of developing heart disease.[1]

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[1] Lindqvist PG, Epstein E, Nielsen K, Landin-Olsson M, Ingvar C, Olsson H (Karolinska University Hospital, Lund University, Lund, Sweden). Avoidance of sun exposure as a risk factor for major causes of death: a competing risk analysis of the Melanoma in Southern Sweden cohort. J Intern Med 2016; doi: 10.1111/joim.12496. Cashman, K. et al. (2016). Vitamin D deficiency in Europe: pandemic?, The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition, 2016 103: 1033-1044.