

Kofinas Perinatal

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A new study estimates that if more Canadians increased their intake of vitamin D, the death rate could fall by 16 per cent, or as many as 37,000 premature deaths a year. The number crunchers factored in the association between vitamin D deficiency and a variety of diseases and conditions, including bone diseases, cancer, autoimmune diseases and cardiovascular diseases. The research was published recently in the journal *Molecular Nutrition and Food Research*.

"The result of this study strongly suggests the personal and economic burden of disease in Canada could be significantly reduced if optimal vitamin D levels are increased," primary author William Grant, of the Sunlight, Nutrition and Health Research Center in San Francisco, said in a release Tuesday. The study notes that Canadians have mean serum levels for vitamin D averaging 67 nanomoles per litre, and says the estimated benefits in disease reduction were based on increasing the level to 105 nanomoles per litre.

Many experts describe 75 nmols per litre as the minimum for good health, co-author Susan Whiting of the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition at the University of Saskatchewan said in an interview. Statistics Canada reported last month that 65 per cent of Canadians who had their blood tested for vitamin D levels, in 15 communities across the country, failed to meet the threshold of 75 nmols per litre. For those used to ng/ml the optimal level for vitamin D3 in our blood is >50 ng/ml and the ideal should be between 60-75 ng/ml.

A primary source for producing vitamin D naturally is the sun, but Whiting notes that Canadians spend a lot of time indoors, and that it's been difficult to come up with a "rational sun exposure measure" given the concerns about skin cancer. Vitamin D can also be obtained through eating certain foods and supplementation. As for economic impact, the study said that boosting vitamin D blood levels would reduce the burden on the health-care system by about \$14.4 billion. However, there would be costs associated with ensuring the population had higher vitamin D levels if this is achieved by fortifying more foods.

The U.S. Institute of Medicine is currently working on setting new dietary reference intakes for vitamin D, and Canadian officials are involved in the process. A report is expected to be published in late summer or the fall. Whiting said it will be important to "do something quickly after that" to raise the recommended levels of vitamin D intake for Canadians.

If one extends this to a worldwide supplementation of vitamin D, it is conceivable that millions of lives will be saved. What is more important for my way of thinking however, is the fact that hundreds of millions of people will live healthier lives with less suffering from all kinds of diseases. Do not wait for the government to solve this problem. Act now. Go to your primary care doctor and ask to have your vitamin levels checked and take as much vitamin D3 as necessary to maintain the healthy and optimal levels mentioned above.