

# The Sunny Side of Vitamin D

## Athlete Scenerio

*Last season, members of my college swim team and I had bone scans. Even though I drink milk, I was surprised that my bones were not as strong as they should be. My vitamin D level was checked and found to be low, at a level that could negatively affect my health and training. What are the benefits of having adequate vitamin D? How can I raise my vitamin D level?*

## Benefits of Adequate Vitamin D

- Promote bone health and muscle function
- Promote Immune function
- Reduce exercise-related inflammation

## Goals for Adequate Vitamin D

- Vitamin D status is determined by blood levels of 25-hydroxyvitamin D. Although optimal levels of vitamin D have not been established for athletes, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) has found that 20 ng/mL is the blood level needed for bone health for most individuals. Higher levels may be needed in order to promote immune function and reduce exercise-related inflammation.
- Expose your face, arms, and legs to the sun between the hours of 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. (or artificial UVB radiation) for 10-25 minutes, 2-3 times per week. Since sunscreen will block vitamin D synthesis, do not apply sunscreen for this moderate exposure.
- Consume vitamin-D rich foods: salmon, tuna, sardines, egg yolks and vitamin D fortified foods: milk, soy milk, yogurt, cheese, margarine, orange juice, ready-to-eat cereals, mushrooms.
- Vitamin D supplementation may be needed if your blood level is low and especially during winter if you live in the northern half of the United States. Vitamin D cannot be made via sun exposure during winter in northern regions. The IOM considers 4,000 IU of vitamin D per day as the upper limit of dietary supplement intake considered to be safe for teens and adults.



## Tips to Take With You

1. Consume vitamin D-rich foods and obtain safe sun exposure.
2. Have your vitamin D level assessed, preferably during the winter months.
3. If your vitamin D level is below the ideal, seek assistance of a sports dietitian or other qualified medical health professional to guide intervention. Recheck vitamin D status in three months.

## Contact SCAN

[www.scandpg.org](http://www.scandpg.org)  
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Written by SCAN registered dietitians (RDs) to provide nutrition guidance. The key to optimal meal planning is individualization. Contact a SCAN RD for personalized nutrition plans. Access "Find a SCAN RD" at [www.scandpg.org](http://www.scandpg.org) or by phone at 800.249.2875.