



Letter to the editor: The Pundit Speaks
By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.
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"Vitamin D To The Rescue...Again"

In December 2010, we were told by the Institute of Medicine, "There's no proof that megadoses of vitamin D prevent cancer or other ailments." The Institute's two-year study concluded that research into the possible role of vitamin D in other diseases is conflicting, with some studies showing no effect and others showing harm. However, this flies in the face of the studies from 2007-2009. Prior studies have shown that rates of breast, colon, ovarian, prostate, pancreatic and lymphomatous cancers are lower in patients with higher vitamin D levels and vitamin D helps prevent cancer cells from growing and spreading. Clinical trials in which people were given high doses of vitamin D showed lower risks of cancer, arthritis and diabetes. I have attributed this to its prooxidant properties (not antioxidant properties). Vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol), which helps with calcium absorption, has rather consistently been reported as being of great benefit to overall good health and has been fortified in milk since 1933 to prevent rickets. Vitamin D improves muscle strength and function in older adults. Estimates are that one in 4 people over age 60 have low vitamin D levels. Sunlight triggers the synthesis of vitamin D (the "sunshine" vitamin) in the skin, and people who get little sun exposure tend to have lower stores of the vitamin. In America, 2,000 IU of vitamin D per day, is the "tolerable upper intake level" set by U.S. health officials. However, the U.S. Institute of Medicine now recommends 600 IU of vitamin D daily and states as little as 400 IU of vitamin D daily may be protective. Women most at risk of developing the life-threatening cancer (melanoma) are those who have had a previous non-melanoma form of skin cancer, such as basal cell or squamous cell cancer, and a new study found that the risk for developing melanoma may be cut in half by taking vitamin D/calcium supplements. The seven year study on 36,282 women was published in the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* and the melanoma risk reduction was not seen among women who had not had an earlier non-melanoma skin cancer. In the United States, more than 68,000 cases of melanoma are diagnosed in adults each year, according to the U.S. National Cancer Institute. Vitamin D can come from the diet, sun exposure and supplements. Fatty fish and fortified dairy products are two good dietary sources of vitamin D.

In the America that I love, maintaining an adequate intake of prooxidant vitamin D3 appears to be one approach to maintaining good health, that is safe, readily available and affordable. My new book, *Antioxidant Overkill*, (available at Amazon.com) presents overwhelming scientific evidence of the potential harm of antioxidant vitamins A, C and E supplements.

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