



Canadian Nutrition Society/Société canadienne de nutrition

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NUTRITION EXPERTS CALL ON HEALTH CANADA TO TAKE ACTION ON NEW VITAMIN D INTAKE REQUIREMENTS TO REDUCE THE HEALTH RISK TO CANADIANS

Regina (November 30th) --The Canadian Nutrition Society (CNS) is calling on Health Canada to act immediately on recommendations made today for Canadians to increase their daily intake of Vitamin D threefold, from 200 to 600 International Units (IUs) in order to protect their health. The CNS represents the pre-eminent experts on nutrition science and practice in Canada.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the U.S. National Academy of Science established the previous Canadian daily intake requirements for Vitamin D in 1997. Its Vitamin D and Calcium panel made up of Canadian and American scientists has proposed a new set of daily intake requirements which the CNS contends could be hard for Canadians to meet just through the foods they eat. The IOM has increased the daily intake requirements for Vitamin D from 200 to 600 international units a day to 600-800 international units.

“This announcement on Vitamin D is very important to the health of Canadians and we hope that all Canadians take note and start to increase their daily intake significantly,” said Dr. Susan Whiting, CNS spokesperson and professor of Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Saskatchewan. “The IOM recommendations are quite a hefty increase in the daily requirement for Vitamin D and makes Canadians even more vulnerable to Vitamin D deficiency particularly this winter because Canadians can’t make Vitamin D from sunlight.”

The CNS is very concerned about the increased health risk to Canadians should they become Vitamin D deficient. A 2009 Canadian research study, *“An estimate of the economic burden and premature deaths due to Vitamin D deficiency in Canada”*, linked vitamin D deficiency to 37,000 deaths and over \$14 billion in health care costs annually in Canada.¹ (Grant, Schwalfenberg, Genius, Whiting) The IOM would not recognize that Vitamin D has a role in other diseases although Canadian research is indicating an impact on the immune system among others.

¹ William B. Grant, Gerry K. Schwalfenberg, Stephen J. Genius and Susan J. Whiting, November 20, 2009 An estimate of the economic burden and premature deaths due to vitamin D deficiency in Canada

“The typical Canadian diet provides only 200 to 300 international units. Almost all Canadians will find it difficult to get 600 international units of vitamin D in their diet from foods alone,” said Dr. Whiting. “We encourage Canadians to eat foods that are rich in Vitamin D – milk, margarine, fish such as salmon, eggs and meats. But we believe that to meet the new requirements, Canadians will have no choice but to take Vitamin D supplements this winter or greatly increase their intake of fortified foods. “

However, adds Dr. Whiting, not everyone can afford supplements so we believe that the government needs to address the food supply to minimize the risk to Canadians.

“The CNS is particularly surprised that the enhanced recommendation for older adults is targeted for only those over 70 as bone health is particularly important for everyone over 50 years,” said Dr. Whiting.

That is why the CNS is urging the federal government to consider increasing the mandatory levels of Vitamin D added to fortify food staples (already mandatory in milk and margarine) and to expand the list of foods that must be fortified with Vitamin D under Canadian Food and Drug Regulations to include other staples such as cereals.

According to the Canadian Food and Drug Regulations, Vitamin D must be added to all fluid milks. Each cup, 250 mL of milk provides 2.5 µg (micrograms) of vitamin D; and margarine must contain 0.6 µg of vitamin D per 5 mL (1 teaspoon). Plant based beverages must also contain comparable levels of calcium and vitamin D to milk if marketed as a milk substitute.² Many orange juices sold in Canada contain Vitamin D (2.5 µg) and yogurts made with fortified milk can contain 0.5-1.0 µg.

Health Canada’s current requirements on Vitamin D were set by the IOM in 1997. Vitamin D daily dosages are measured in IU (international units). These 1997 requirements are 400 IU for infants, 200 IU for people ages 1 to 50, 400 IU for 51 – 70, 600 IU for over 70 years old. Health Canada currently recommends that those over the age of 50 take a Vitamin D supplement each day to meet their higher requirements.

For Canadians, Vitamin D intake is particularly problematic because of our long winters. One of the major sources of Vitamin D is ultraviolet light in sunlight. The human body naturally produces Vitamin D in skin when exposed to sunlight, but only in summer months (April to October) in Canada, due to our high latitude.

About Canadian Nutrition Society (CNS)

Canadian Nutrition Society/la Société canadienne de nutrition (CNS/SCN), composed of scientists, physicians including gastroenterologists and pediatricians, and dietitians, is the leading expert in nutrition science, policy, and practice. It advocates for the use of nutrition

² 2 Addition of Vitamins and Minerals to Foods, 2005, HealthCanada, http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/vitamin/fortification_final_doc_1-eng.php#c6

to improve the health of Canadians, and to protect them by using better nutrition to prevent and treat diseases.

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For more information and to arrange an interview, please call:
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Dietary Reference Intakes for Vitamin D (IOM)

Age Groups	Adequate Intake 1997	Requirement Intake 2010	Tolerable Upper Intake 997	Tolerable Upper Intake 2010
1 to 3	200 IU			2,500 IU
4 to 8	200 IU			3,000 IU
19-50	200 IU	600 IU	2,000 IU	4,000 IU
51 -70	400 IU	600 IU	2,000 IU	4,000 IU
71 and older	600 IU	800 IU	2,000 IU	4,000 IU