

Has the Institute of Medicine failed millions?

The countries top vitamin D researchers are up in arms over the government's new recommendations for this nutrient. The governmental agency known as the Food and Nutrition Board (FNB) at the Institute of Medicine, convened after 13 years of silence on the subject. The results were astonishing. Not only was the RDA minimally raised from the already deficient 400 units to 600 units per day, but the ruling also LOWERED the range for vitamin D in the blood from 30 ng/ml to a dangerously unhealthy level of 20 ng/ml. Both recommendations are a slap in the face to the last 15 years of research on vitamin D performed by the world's top scientists.

Extremely misleading, the new daily dosage recommended by the FNB states that a 3 pound premature infant requires approximately the same dosage as a 300 pound pregnant woman.

Ironically, there are countless studies showing that if blood levels drop below 30 ng/ml, the osteoid seam width (a measurement performed on bone to evaluate vitamin D deficiency) is shortened, resulting in a very high risk for bone fractures.

Why then, would a government agency set up to protect our health, make such backward suggestions on blood levels and barely increase the dosage recommendations by a mere 200 units? Good question!

There are several likely reasons why this questionable advice was released. You may not realize, but the main task of the FNB is to produce a recommended daily allowance (RDA) that is the smallest daily amount required to prevent debilitating disease. In this case it's the bone deforming disease rickets. It is also the real brunt of why our health is suffering; taking only what's absolutely necessary, instead of an optimal dose that would actually benefit us. Cancer rates, heart disease and deterioration in bone health are on a dramatic rise; no thanks to government standards for vitamin D!

Secondly, since the report's focus was on vitamin D and calcium metabolism; they made suggestions surrounding disease processes that could encourage abnormal calcium deposition. Both kidney stones and sarcoidosis are examples of diseases which require close monitoring of blood calcium and vitamin D levels. Somehow, the FNB reasoned that if everyone kept their blood level at 20ng/ml, these relatively rare diseases would be reduced. This may be the case for these two diseases; it doesn't however, take into account the health benefits missing for the majority of the population. Cancer and heart disease are tremendously more prevalent and much more likely to kill you or a loved one. Doesn't it make common sense to strive toward a serum level (50-80 ng/ml) that has been shown in the research to be protective against these killers?

Thirdly, and the most absurd move by FNB was their circular logic that since 80% of the population shows a deficiency status of 30 ng/ml or less, the range should be lowered to an even more suboptimal level of 20 ng/ml. Voila, in one fail swoop, government standards re-categorized the majority of American's from vitamin D deficient to vitamin D sufficient.

But wait, tens of millions of pregnant women are already severely vitamin D deficient. As a result there has been a huge increase in rickets. The FNB report reasons that because so many pregnant women have low vitamin D levels, it must be OK because low levels are so common.

The single most important fact to contemplate about vitamin D is this: skin exposure to midday summer sun, (20 minutes for most fair-skinned people) can produce in our bodies upwards of 20,000 units of vitamin D. This is an overwhelming 30 times greater amount than the government is suggesting we take! Our bodies evolved in the sun, our human machinery in its infinite wisdom developed this incredible feature for a reason – our health! Therefore, it might not be advantageous to follow what a panel of non-experts have to say about our bodies true requirements for vitamin D. Several studies have shown that people who work and play in the sun (without oral supplementation of Vitamin D levels) demonstrate levels of 50-80ng/ml; a far cry from the miniscule new suggested range of 20ng/ml. This subgroup also shows an extremely low incidence of deadly cancers and auto-immune disease. Hmm, who knows best about our health...Mother Nature or the Government??

Hence, if you would like to optimize your vitamin D levels and not just prevent debilitating bone disease, supplementation is crucial! With a mere 200 unit increase from 400 to 600units, you will not see any increase in your blood levels (unless you happened to be a small infant). As a rule of thumb, it takes approximately 2,000 IU/ day for 2-3 months to increase your blood level 10 points (i.e. 20ng/ml to 30ng/ml).

Therefore, in a completely substantiated rebuttal; the Vitamin D Council, comprised of the top Vitamin D researchers – who were by the way not asked to be part of the government's 14 member panel, as well as Dr. Lucinda Messer a local Seattle physician, vitamin D and health expert, and author of Powerful Medicine: Vitamin D; Shedding Light on a Worldwide Health Crisis, concur unanimously: IGNORE the ridiculously misconstrued recommended level of 20 ng/ml and instead work on achieving a blood level between 50-80 ng/ml, either by yourself or with the guidance of a knowledgeable physician. This blood level is much more capable of ensuring not only bone health, but will guarantee there will be enough vitamin D available in your body to produce the most potent of secosteroid hormones - Calcitriol. This activated form of vitamin D cannot be produced in your body to protect you against a myriad of diseases such as cancer and MS if your blood levels are below 50ng/ml!!

Lastly, and even more importantly, we now know that the human genome carries in it (on the DNA) over 2700 binding sites for Calcitriol. These binding sites powerfully control the on/off switch for genes to activate proteins that control most ALL diseases.

What could possibly happen if all people were encouraged to take enough vitamin D (or get enough from the sun) in order to achieve a serum level of 50-80 ng/ml? The result would be a much healthier population; with hundreds of thousands fewer cases of cancer and auto-immune disease and saving millions on yearly healthcare costs. Unfortunately, we will never realize a healthier nation if we maintain blood levels at the government's recommendation of 20ng/ml.

Dr. Lucinda Messer is the author of Powerful Medicine: Vitamin D; Shedding Light on a Worldwide Health Crisis. She is a Naturopathic Physician; board certified in Family Medicine,

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