

**UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF OBSTETRICS AND GYNECOLOGY**

VITAMIN D SUPPLEMENTATION

Vitamin D is a vitamin that is present in very few foods and produced mainly by the body with sunlight exposure. A large percentage of the population becomes Vitamin D deficient during the fall and winter, particularly in northern latitudes. Vitamin D is an essential vitamin for promoting calcium absorption, bone growth, and has many other roles in human health, such as reducing inflammation. Based on research studies suggesting a health benefit to Vitamin D supplementation, we recommend the following to our pregnant and non-pregnant patients:

- 1) The largest source of vitamin D is sunlight and UV light. It is also found in fortified milk, eggs, fatty fish, and fortified grains.
- 2) Between 36-100% of Northern European women are vitamin D deficient. Mexican Americans and African Americans tend to have lower vitamin D levels than Caucasian women. Among women living in northern latitudes (higher than 37°N) the prevalence of vitamin D deficiency is higher. The latitude of Seattle is 47°N.
- 3) Age, skin color, and latitude influence how much sun exposure is actually converted into vitamin D.
- 4) Without significant sunlight exposure, the amount of vitamin D in regular vitamins, prenatal vitamins, and milk alone is insufficient to maintain a normal level.
- 5) Current recommendations in pregnancy are vitamin D 400 IU daily; however the appropriate dose is unknown in pregnancy and lactation. It is thought 400 IU may be inadequate and that higher doses are safe and should be encouraged.

We recommend:

- 1) In addition to a prenatal vitamin (which may contain about 400 IU), consider taking an extra vitamin D supplement of 1,000-2,000 IU daily.
- 2) The daily recommended intake for vitamin D during lactation has been arbitrarily set at 400 IU. Continue to take extra supplementation during lactation as well.
- 3) Vitamin D supplementation should be given to infants who are exclusively breast fed because the vitamin D content of human milk is low. You may want to discuss this with your pediatrician.

Speak with your doctor if you have other medical conditions that may change your recommended dose of vitamin D.