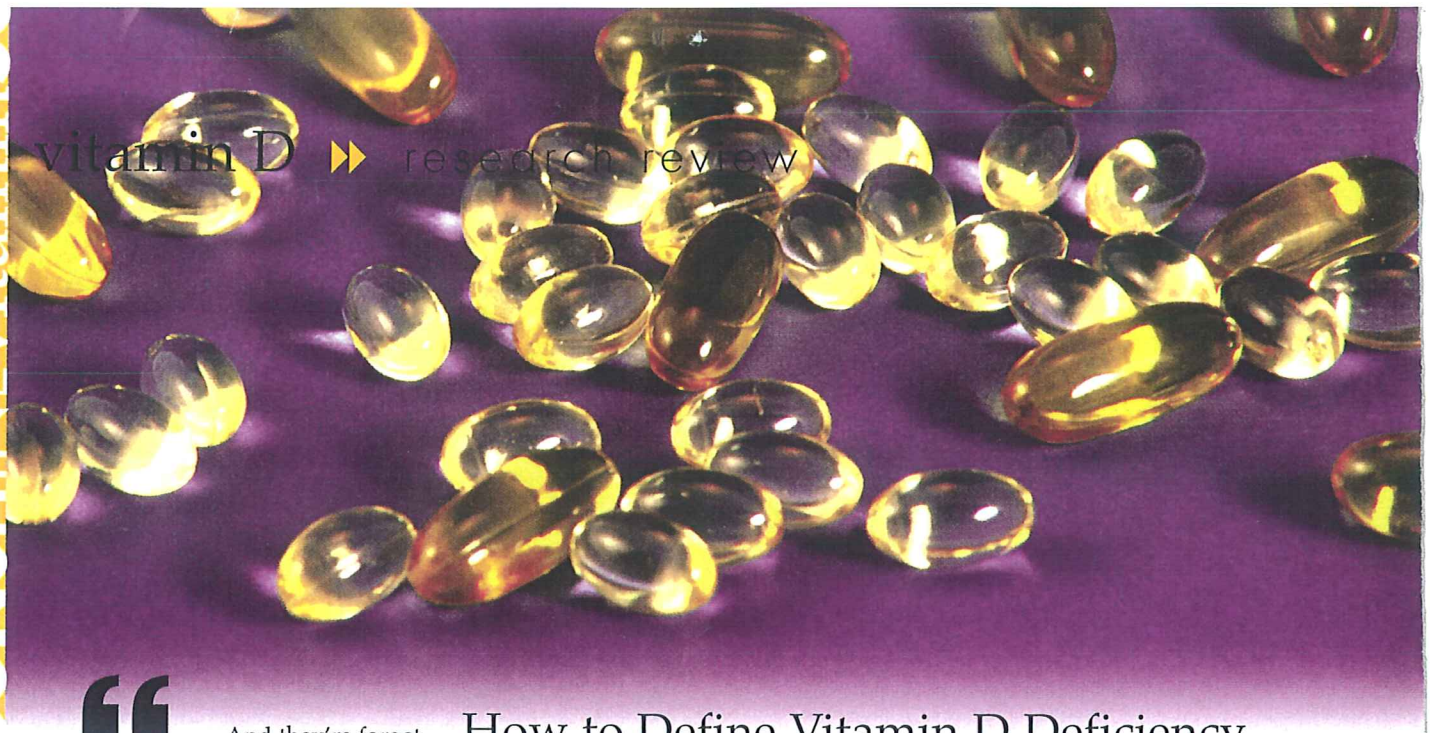

How to Define Vitamin D Deficiency

BY JOSEPH LEVY

▸▸The dermatology industry's top lobbying groups continue to tell people to avoid sunlight completely because they believe diet and vitamin D supplements are all you need to avoid vitamin D deficiency.

The problem is they're using a Dark Ages definition of vitamin D deficiency. And they're forgetting that sun exposure is the body's natural and intended way to make vitamin D.

Current vitamin D recommendations – 200 international units a day for most of us and 600 units for those over 70 – should be tossed away. The fact is "currently there is no standard definition of optimal vitamin D status."

Those were the words of Dr. Bess Dawson-Hughes, Dr. Robert P. Heaney, Dr. Michael F. Holick, Dr. Paul Lips, Dr. Pierre J. Meunier and Dr. Reinhold Vieth in their recent paper, "Estimates of Optimal Vitamin D Status."

The fact is, today's D recommendations are based on the content of one tablespoon of cod liver oil – the early 1920s remedy for preventing the bone disease, rickets. So for the rest of the 20th century vitamin D health was defined this way.

It wasn't until 1998 when vitamin D scientists made the next leap, quantifying for the first time that vitamin D is activated and processed by cells throughout the body, not just in the liver and kidneys.

What this meant, and what has been solidified by hundreds of studies since then, is that vitamin D plays a role in so much more than just bone health. It plays a role in regulating cell growth – including preventing or retarding the growth of cancer cells – throughout the body.

But how much vitamin D do you need to fulfill these functions? Throw the old definitions away – the answer surely does not lie in the totally random levels defined by a tablespoon of cod liver oil.

Researchers are starting to close in on that answer. But they'll also tell you that they don't know for certain. Some say 1,000 international units a day will do the trick – others have said 2,000-5,000 units should be the new standard. It will continue to be debated.

In the wake of all this debate is the fact that a single tanning session in a tanning unit with some UVB (and almost all tanning units, like the sun, do emit UVA and UVB) will manufacture 10,000-15,000 units of vitamin D the natural way. And the good part about making vitamin D this way – as opposed to getting it in diet – is that your body knows what to do with any extra – you cannot overdose on vitamin D made from the sun.

Humans were intended to live outdoors – yet we spend more time indoors today than at any point in human history. Since sunlight is the body's natural way to produce vitamin D, don't you think vitamin D levels might be optimized by making it this way – the natural way?◂◂

> "And they're forgetting that **sun exposure is the body's natural and intended way to make vitamin D.**"

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