

Study links vitamin D to quality of life

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Seniors may be able to give their quality of life a boost by getting more sun or taking vitamin D supplements, according to a recent UAlberta study.

Canadians wait for it every year: the annual flight of the snowbirds in winter. Could there be an underlying health reason these birds take flight to sunnier climates? A researcher at the University of Alberta thinks so.

Experts agree that vitamin D is beneficial for bone health, but its relationship to overall quality of life is a little-understood area. However, Paul Veugelers, professor in the School of Public Health, recently

published research showing that the sun's rays have a deeper benefit to our well-being.

Veugelers and fellow researchers teamed up to study health-related quality of life in seniors. In the study, published in *Quality of Life Research*, about 1,500 people participating in lifestyle counselling programs had their blood drawn to assess vitamin D levels. They also answered a questionnaire to provide a self-assessment of five factors used to quantify health-related quality of life: their personal mobility, self-care, [everyday activities](#), pain or discomfort, and anxiety and depression.

"In this study, we observed a clear relationship between higher vitamin D serum levels and a better quality of life," says Veugelers. "In other words: you don't feel well? Sit in the sun or take some vitamin D supplements."

Participants reported problems with mobility, everyday activities, and depression and anxiety, which had significant associations with vitamin D levels. And about eight per cent of the participants had vitamin D levels below the level recommended by Health Canada.

Veugelers cautions that the low rate of vitamin D deficiency could be attributed to the fact that the study participants included self-selected volunteers. Because they chose to participate in a lifestyle counselling program, participants were considered to be generally more health-conscious, and could already be taking supplements.

But Veugelers also notes that vitamin D deficiency is likely greater in the general population. Although Canadians are aware of the effect that climate has on their vitamin D levels, Veugelers says, there is an opportunity to create greater awareness of vitamin D deficiency in Canada.

The research was funded by Pure North S'Energy Foundation. The funding allows Veugelers, as the Alberta Research Chair in Nutrition and Disease Prevention, to investigate nutrition, chronic disease prevention, vitamin D and population health. The chair's activities are overseen by a science advisory committee, consisting largely of other university researchers with expertise in health, nutrition and chronic disease prevention.

Veugelers and his team are now assessing whether seniors who have low levels of vitamin D have their health-related quality of life increase with the inclusion of vitamin D supplements in their diets. But for now, he suggests that seniors should ensure they follow Health Canada's recommendations and take more vitamin D to increase their quality of life.

"A health issue like this requires multiple interventions, but has potential impact on many areas of health, from chronic diseases to mental [health](#). A better understanding of [vitamin D](#) benefits Canadians in many ways, so we hope our research will help people lead healthier, happier lives."

More information: The complete study is available online:
link.springer.com/article/10.1...0696-6/fulltext.html

Provided by University of Alberta

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