Letter to the Editor

Tanning Can Be an Alternative Source of Vitamin D in High Risk Populations

To the Editor,

Recently, Hyppönen and Power (1) reported widespread prevalence of vitamin deficiency in middle-aged British whites. Persistence of mean serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D concentrations below the recommended 75 nmol/L (2) during the winter months in subjects taking oral vitamin D supplements is of concern. Vieth et al. (3) suggested revision of current recommendation of dietary vitamin D intakes which currently are felt too low, and the judicious use of other options like ultraviolet (UV) radiation as a source of vitamin D. Normally, ninety percent of daily body requirements of vitamin D can be met through UV radiation from sunlight (4). But vitamin D production from sunlight in winter months is inadequate in high risk populations especially those living at high latitudes (5), and elderly people who usually are home bound (6). Several studies have shown monitored use of UV radiation as a safe and effective way of raising vitamin D status in these high risk population groups (7, 8). Tanners have shown to be having higher serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D concentrations than non-tanners (9). Recently, Chandra et al. (10) showed that UV therapy with a sunlamp in winter months can prevent a fall in 25-hydroxyvitamin D concentrations in patients with malabsorption syndromes after high dose oral vitamin D supplementation has failed. Guided UV therapy seems to be an exciting source of raising vitamin D status in high risk populations living at high latitudes that lack adequate sunlight exposure during winter months, and where food is usually not vitamin D fortified. More clinical trials, and expert consensus recommendation is needed to explore UVB therapy as an alternative source to raise vitamin D levels in these subjects.

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