

features

The sunshine vitamin people are lacking

SAMANTHA DIDION
Reporter

Some say that weather in Ashland, OH can be inconsistent and it is no secret that Ohio is not known for the heavy flow of spring breakers looking to soak up some sun. But regardless of the time of year and how often one spends outside, doctors say the majority of people still have a deficiency that only the sunshine vitamin can cure. A vitamin D deficiency means that the person affected does not have enough vitamin D in their body. Vitamin D is unique in that the skin produces it by using sunlight. Fair-skinned individuals, and those who are younger, convert sunshine into vitamin D far better than those who are darker-skinned and over age 50, according to the Cleveland Clinic’s website. Humans naturally produce vitamin D while in the sun, but even during the warm summer months and the bright winter months it is still not enough. This is partly because people do not often see the sun in Northeast Ohio. Vitamin D is produced when the skin is exposed to sunshine, or rather, the ultraviolet B radiation that the sun emits.

ducing. “These types of therapies improve symptoms in about 50 to 80 percent of people affected [by SAD,]” he said. A study published in 2014 by Danish researchers found that vitamin D supplementation did not directly improve SAD symptoms. Nonetheless, it is still a step in the right direction, according to Buchinsky. “You can ultimately have better bone function, better brain function and hopefully prevent cardiovascular disease, brain dysfunction and enhance your immunity,” he said. It is clear that vitamin D fulfills many basic needs. “What I’ve been doing since the sun has been out, is I’ll just come out here and sit on the benches and people-watch,” said Chavis. And while it is good to get outside, even in the summer when there is much more sun than normal, people are most likely not getting enough vitamin D. Buchinsky said that 60 to 90 percent of his patients, who are from this part of the country, are vitamin D deficient. In the winter, those numbers jump even more. Sometimes you could be de-



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The summer months allow for vitamin D to be easily produced.



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Vitamin D supplements are regularly taken by some athletes.

The Cleveland Clinic states that the amount of vitamin D the skin makes depends on many factors. These include: the season, time of day, amount of cloud cover and air pollution, where someone lives and the melanin content of one’s skin. “It tends to be very, very grey, very overcast,” said Don Alensworth Davies, who moved to Ohio about 10 years ago. For a few months in the summer, most people try to soak it up for all it is worth. “You feel so happy, refreshed, rejuvenated and you just want to be out in the sun,” said Darynice Chavis, who works in Cleveland. Dr. Roy Buchinsky from University Hospitals said it is not just a coincidence that people feel better in the sun, it is chemistry. When individuals are dealing with seasonal affective disorder, SAD, they are often pointed in the direction of light therapy or are exposed to artificial ultraviolet light which increases the amount of vitamin D their body is pro-

ducing. “These types of therapies improve symptoms in about 50 to 80 percent of people affected [by SAD,]” he said. A study published in 2014 by Danish researchers found that vitamin D supplementation did not directly improve SAD symptoms. Nonetheless, it is still a step in the right direction, according to Buchinsky. “You can ultimately have better bone function, better brain function and hopefully prevent cardiovascular disease, brain dysfunction and enhance your immunity,” he said. It is clear that vitamin D fulfills many basic needs. “What I’ve been doing since the sun has been out, is I’ll just come out here and sit on the benches and people-watch,” said Chavis. And while it is good to get outside, even in the summer when there is much more sun than normal, people are most likely not getting enough vitamin D. Buchinsky said that 60 to 90 percent of his patients, who are from this part of the country, are vitamin D deficient. In the winter, those numbers jump even more. Sometimes you could be de-

Among players in the National Football League, 26 percent were found to be vitamin D deficient and 42 to 80 percent of the athletes had levels defined as insufficient. “Only 36 percent of Liverpool’s professional soccer academy players were found to be either deficient or insufficient. Among professional hockey players, we found vitamin D deficiencies in 0 percent and insufficiency in only 13 percent,” Fishman said. “These low numbers are due to race, given that 96.2 percent of the hockey players are white.” Deficiencies or insufficiencies have been found in most dancers, taekwondo fighters, jockeys, elite wheelchair athletes, handball players, track and field athletes, weightlifters, swimmers and volleyball players, he said. Fishman recommends that vitamin D levels be checked on an annual basis for all athletes. If their level is deficient

or insufficient, athletes should be supplemented with vitamin D to help decrease the risk of injuries, while possibly improving performance. Buchinsky said the brands of different vitamins do not matter to him as much as the amount in each supplement. However, it varies for different age groups. It is important to get your levels checked in order to figure out exactly how much is needed based on your age and deficiency, he said. Buchinsky also wants to remind everyone that if you are wearing sunscreen to protect against the sun’s harmful rays, you will not be taking in any vitamin D and should be taking a supplement.



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Sun in the winter months is hard to come by in Northeast Ohio.