

## **Soak up that summer sunshine!**

We've all heard that the sun gives us Vitamin D, and it's true! When sunshine hits our skin, our bodies make Vitamin D. This important vitamin could be considered Calcium's sidekick, since it helps our bones stay strong. You may need as little as 5-30 minutes in the sun twice weekly to meet your Vitamin D needs. Getting your daily dose of Vitamin D can be as simple as walking the dog, watering the flowers, or walking to and from the dining hall at camp.

Sunscreen can block the rays that cause our skin to make Vitamin D, but health professionals say that most people do not apply sunscreen well enough to completely block those rays anyway. To avoid skin damage that can lead to skin cancer, it is recommended to always wear sunscreen when in the sun. The American Academy of Dermatology recommends SPF 30 or higher.

## **More benefits of Vitamin D**

While the largest role of Vitamin D is to maintain healthy, strong bones, there are many other benefits to getting enough Vitamin D. Research has shown that Vitamin D may help prevent heart disease, multiple sclerosis (MS), depression, and even the flu! Some studies even suggest Vitamin D may help prevent certain types of cancer. Vitamin D toxicity (too much Vitamin D) is rare, but can happen, especially if taking supplements.

## **What about winter?**

During the winter, depending on where you live, the sun might not get high enough for your skin to make Vitamin D. On top of that, most people stay bundled up, meaning not enough of their skin is exposed to sunlight. During the colder months, it's important to eat foods with Vitamin D to make up for the decreased sun exposure. Good food sources of Vitamin D include cod liver oil, swordfish, salmon, tuna, fortified milk, fortified orange juice, eggs, and fortified cereal. If you're worried you might not be getting enough Vitamin D, you should speak with your doctor about testing for Vitamin D deficiency and supplementation.

## **Pair Vitamin D with Calcium**

When you get Vitamin D, both from the sunshine and from food, try to eat or drink foods with calcium, too. Milk is the best source of calcium, but if you can't drink milk, try fortified milk alternatives, collard greens, kale, broccoli, sardines, salmon, fortified tofu, or fortified cereal. Vitamin D and Calcium work together in your body to make your bones strong – they can't work without each other.