

Breast cancer risk 'virtually eradicated' by elevated vitamin D levels, researchers suggest

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Breast cancer is a disease so directly related to vitamin D deficiency that a woman's risk of contracting the disease can be 'virtually eradicated' by elevating her vitamin D status to what vitamin D scientists consider to be natural blood levels.

That's the message vitamin D pioneer Dr. Cedric Garland delivered in Toronto Tuesday as part of the University of Toronto School of Medicine's "Diagnosis and Treatment of Vitamin D Deficiency" conference - the largest gathering of vitamin D researchers in North America this year. More than 170 researchers, public health officials and health practitioners gathered at the UT Faculty club for the landmark event.

Garland's presentation headlined a conference that reviewed many aspects of the emerging vitamin D research field - a booming discipline that has seen more than 3,000 academic papers this calendar year alone, conference organizers said.

That makes vitamin D by far the most prolific topic in medicine this year, with work connecting it with risk reduction in two dozen forms of cancer, heart disease, multiple sclerosis and many other disorders.

Dr. Reinhold Vieth, Associate Professor in the Department of Laboratory Medicine and Pathobiology at University of Toronto, and Director of the Bone and Mineral Laboratory at Mount Sinai Hospital, organized the event in conjunction with Grassroots Health - an international vitamin D advocacy group founded by breast cancer survivor Carole Baggerly.

Baggerly implored the research group to take action and encourage Canadians to learn more about vitamin D and to raise their vitamin D levels.

An estimated 22,700 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in 2009, according to the Canadian Cancer Society's latest figures.

As much as 97 percent of Canadians are vitamin D deficient at some point in the year, according to University of Calgary research - largely due to Canada's northerly latitudes and weak sun exposure. Sunshine is by far the most abundant source of vitamin D - called 'The Sunshine Vitamin' - with salmon and fortified milk being other sources. Vitamin D supplementation helps raise levels for many as well.

Grassroots Health's "D-action" panel - 30 of the world's leading researchers on vitamin D and many other vitamin D supporters - recommend 2,000 IU of vitamin D daily and vitamin D blood levels of 100-150 nanomoles-per-liter as measured by a vitamin D blood test.

(This is why Dr. Reeder for many years has advocated sufficient sun exposure and/or taking regular Vit D supplements. In his opinion, "slip slop slap" slogans for sun avoidance have possibly done immeasurably more harm than good. He argues moreover, that unproven is the potential harm from skin absorption of chemical additives in the creams and lotions applied all over the body surface area. He advises common sense should prevail to avoid burning and long term skin damage.)

Vieth pointed out that natural vitamin D levels of mammals who live outdoors in sunny climates is higher than that - up to 200 nanomoles-per liter. And Garland, whose presentation was entitled "Breast Cancer as a Vitamin D Deficiency Disease" presented data showing that raising one's vitamin D status near those levels decreased breast cancer risk more than 77 percent.

'The Sunshine Vitamin' was once thought of only for bone health, helping the body process calcium. But more recent work has shown that all cells in the body have "vitamin D receptors" which help control normal cell growth. Additionally, Garland presented new evidence that low vitamin D status compromises the integrity of calcium-based cellular bonding within tissues, which when eroded allow rogue cancer cells to spread more readily.

Grassroots Health is trying to raise vitamin D awareness among Canadians. Despite epidemic-level vitamin D deficiency in Canada, fewer than nine per cent of Canadians have ever had their vitamin D levels checked by a professional and most who have do not know their vitamin D blood level.

Dr Reeder said ***"New Zealand laboratory policy advises doctors DO NOT measure Vit D levels and to guess whether YOU may or may not need Vit D ! This logic is as bad as saying dont measure your cholesterol, let your doctor guess it and prescribe a statin drug."***