

A Weapon in the Fight Against Flu and the Blues

The recent swine flu scare had everyone worried about their health, but there's good news for those "ounce of prevention" types and it's called Vitamin D. Having enough is important because recent studies have shown when levels of vitamin D are low, we're more susceptible to colds and flus. So while not exactly a cure, it is effective in staving off those rampant viruses floating around at the office.

Vitamin D is actually a hormone which encourages and empowers your immune system through the production of cathelicidin (a protein that fights bacteria). Its two biggest sources are the sun and fortified milk – but you can also take supplements or visit your local tanning salon for some full spectrum UV light therapy. The latter is also a recognized treatment for seasonal affective disorder (winter blues) and much cheaper than a Mediterranean cruise. Dr. Jan Gurley — Doc Gurley — a medical blogger for the San Francisco Gate, speculates that increased vitamin D intake in the summer is one the reasons the flu tends to disappear in the summer . She also says ultraviolet lights can help kill the influenza virus on surfaces .

Most people can take up to 1,000 IU of vitamin D per day, but if you're not sure, just get a blood test and let your doctor help you find your optimal level.

Vitamin D is quickly turning into the wonder vitamin of this decade. It's easy to get (sunlight in the summer, tanning salons in colder weather), inexpensive (sunlight is free, most tanning salons have membership programs, and vitamin D milk is \$3 per gallon), and it can help fight a number of different ailments, including certain cancers, seasonal affective disorder, and even the basic flu.