American Academy of Pediatrics Doubles Vitamin D Recommendation

Based on numerous studies to support their decision, in December 2008, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) took the bold step to double the recommendation for vitamin D intake for children and adolescents.

The previous 2003 clinical report had recommended 200 IU of vitamin D per day beginning at 2 month of age up through adolescence. This newest recommendation promotes 400 IU per day beginning in the first few days of life – double the previous guidelines and beginning earlier.

In the past, vitamin D was recognized for its positive effect on bones and teeth. Over the past few years, however, researchers are finding links between vitamin D and numerous other functions in the body. Low vitamin D is being associated with increased risk of autoimmune diseases (such as type 1 diabetes in children and teens), cardiovascular disease, and some cancers.

The incidence of rickets, which occurs due to vitamin D deficiency in children and teens, is on the rise. Screenings indicate that many more children and teens than we have thought are testing as vitamin D deficient. This is probably due to them spending less time outdoors, the use of sunscreen, and low intake of the limited food sources of vitamin D (such as milk). Persons with darker pigmented skin or who are obese, are more likely to be vitamin D deficient as well.

It was previously thought that daily intake of 200 IU/day in these age groups would be adequate, but it appears that intake needs to be higher. The reason for recommending supplementation beginning so early in life is that the content of vitamin D in breast milk is dependent on the mother's vitamin D status.

Once a child has reached one year of age, whole milk (which contains 100 IU vitamin D per 8oz.) can be added to their diet. After about 2-3 years of age, this can change to low fat milk which contains the same level of vitamin D. Children and teens would need to consume four glasses of milk a day to meet their daily need for vitamin D (which would also cover their need for calcium).