

Coronavirus lockdown and lack of sunlight: How Ayurveda helps in maintaining Vitamin D balance

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Implementing these steps advised in Ayurveda is essential in protecting ourselves from a lack of Vitamin D.

By Dr Partap Chauhan

With everything that is going on all around us, one would assume that dealing with a lack of Vitamin D would hardly seem to be on anyone's priority list. But over a year of staying indoors and away from the sun has led to a lack of Vitamin D in many. As if the lack of social interaction and anxiety due to the pandemic having affected both our mental and physical health wasn't enough, illnesses arising due to a lack of Vitamin D have begun to creep up on many of us.

A lack of Vitamin D in our body can lead to various types of illnesses, such as cold, flu and different types of cancer, among other ailments. It can lead to fatigue and tiredness, hair loss, bone issues and back pain. Vitamin D has a major role to play when it comes to ageing as well, as it affects the proper functioning of the liver.

Vitamin D has vital roles to play in immunity, blood pressure and calcium metabolism.

Take for instance those of us who have hair issues. We try all sorts of hair products to make our hair stronger and stop hair loss. But where we go wrong with these methods is that we concentrate only on the external factors, when the real results are brought about when we start applying changes from within the body. This process can be reversed by increasing the amount of Vitamin D our body has, as according to Ayurveda, it is our diet that shall help us in combating the issues.

One of the most dangerous problems that can be caused due to Vitamin D deficiency is the weakening of our bone health and bone loss, causing falls and fractures.

In Ayurveda, there is a term called Dhātu which are of seven kinds: Rasa, Rakta, Mamsa, Meda, Asthi, Majja and Sukhra and are collectively known as Saptadhatu.

Dhatus are connected with the tissues in the body and it primarily supports the structure of the body.

Among the seven Dhatus, the asthi (bone) dhatu gives solid structure to the body.

Adequate Earth and air is must to produce healthy asthi dhatu, which could be achieved through a healthy diet.

Earthy food could include mushrooms, beets and other root vegetables.

Although, just by consuming the right diet, a healthy asthidhatu can't be guaranteed. One must ensure that his digestive fire is healthy otherwise, the nutrients might not get extracted from the diet and they could even toxify the body and mind.

Arthritis and muscle pain have been linked to the deficiency of Vitamin D. At the same time, post-surgery recovery and healing is also affected if you have less Vitamin D in your body. If the natural attributes of your vatadosha are dryness and roughness, then a person with aggravated vatadosha would need to take foods that are moist and oily, or they would face dry hair problems.

The sun's rays play a vital role in the formation of Vitamin D, but for more than a year now we have been protecting ourselves from the coronavirus by staying indoors, which has severely affected our exposure to the sun, and hence the natural formation of Vitamin D in our bodies. 7-dehydrocholesterol which is found in the skin, along with ultraviolet B light from the sun's rays is needed to produce Vitamin D in the body, something which we are lacking.

But exposure to the sun is not the only way in which we get Vitamin D; our diet plays an important role too. With an increase in the fast food way of life, our consumption of canned food has gone up, the milk we consume is not as fresh. We need to have richer sources of milk for building Vitamin D and also leave the habit of having leftover, or tamasic food, according to Ayurveda. This is because these can make the liver toxic, and the liver is the place where Vitamin D3 is finally converted into Vitamin D.

Vitamin has two categories – Fat-soluble and non-fat or water-soluble. Vitamin D comes under fat-soluble vitamin category.

Let us understand what they are:

Fat-soluble vitamins can get dissolved in fats and oils. As we know, vitamins are nutrients required by the body to function and stay healthy. Fat-soluble vitamins are absorbed along with the fats in the food and are stored in the body's fatty tissue and liver. Vitamins like A, D, E and K are fat-soluble vitamins as they are soluble in organic solvents.

Non-fat-soluble vitamins are important for physiological processes such as bone health, vision, immune function, and coagulation.

Non-fat-soluble or water-soluble vitamins are the ones that can dissolve in water. These kinds of vitamins are carried to the body's tissues but they are not stored in the body. They can be consumed in dietary supplements and must be taken daily. Vitamin C and members of the vitamin B complex comes under water soluble vitamin category.

The primary job of water-soluble vitamins is to keep tissues healthy and it also helps in freeing the energy found in the food we eat.

Therefore, if we have a strong digestive system, our body can absorb essential nutrients from food, which rules out deficiencies in our systems. However, those with a weak digestion system shall end up with ailments according to Ayurveda. When the agni (digestive fire) is weak there is indigestion which affects the dosha balance (vatta, pitta, kapha) which lead to various deficiencies. This is why it is important to improve our digestive system according to guidelines set by Ayurveda, so the absorption of nutrients improves. Milk, orange juice and mushrooms are a few rich sources of Vitamin D.

Even though we are hardly stepping out, we can increase the production of Vitamin D in our body through the practice of Surya Namaskar, as suggested by Ayurveda. Find the best place in your house, like your balcony, where you get maximum exposure to the sun's rays. Practice Surya Namaskar here daily. Our ancestors would do this as a prayer of gratitude for the rays that the sun bestows upon us. Practice this early in the morning when the sun is at its peak and you get maximum exposure to the sun's rays.

Another method prescribed by Ayurveda is Abhyanga or oil massage followed by sitting out in the sun, which can be very beneficial. It is advised to use sesame oil for the best results.

Internal lubrication is another effective way of improving our overall health with Ayurveda that ultimately aids in improving the absorption of nutrients, as mentioned before. This is by lubricating the body internally through the navadwara (nine openings of the body). Applying two drops of ghee or oil to these openings (eyes, mouth, ears) and drinking ghee once a week helps in this process.

Implementing these steps advised in Ayurveda is essential in protecting ourselves from a lack of Vitamin D. In our current junk food and fast lifestyle fuelled culture, we have left behind the wisdom bestowed upon us by our ancient sages, and the only ones who have been harmed due to that is us. We need to follow what they had advised for us, whether it be for mind, body or soul, and soon enough we shall reap the benefits.

(The author is Director of Jiva Ayurveda, is an author, public speaker, TV personality and Ayurvedacharya. The article is for informational purposes only. Please consult health experts and medical professionals before starting any therapy or medication. Views expressed are personal and do not reflect the official position or policy of the Financial Express Online.)