The Canadian Pediatric Society as well as Health Canada recommends that « all healthy term infants who are breastfed should receive a vitamin D supplement of 10µg/day (400 IU/day). This supplementation should start from birth and continue until the infant’s diet contains at least 10µg/day (400IU/day) of vitamin D or until the baby reaches one year of age^1».

Vitamin D is a steroid hormone produced by the skin in response to ultraviolet B (UVB) rays from the sun. It is necessary for the absorption of calcium. It also plays a role in the regulation of the growth of cells, immunity and cellular metabolism.

Very few foods contain naturally occurring vitamin D. The most important source of vitamin D for humans is exposure to sunlight. However, skin pigmentation, the time of year, the region and latitude where one lives, the amount of skin surface that is exposed and the usage of sunscreen are all factors that influence the body’s capacity to produce vitamin D. In Quebec, given the northern latitude, there is very little opportunity for the skin to synthesize vitamin D between the months of October to March.

Recent research suggests that having optimal levels of vitamin D could play an important role in the prevention of several diseases including osteoporosis, asthma, autoimmune disease, diabetes and certain cancers. Vitamin D supplementation is also recommended for the prevention of rickets, a rare disease involving insufficient calcification of the bones and cartilage.

**During your pregnancy**

When a mother has an adequate reserve of vitamin D, enough vitamin D will pass through the placenta for the fetus to create reserves for the first 2 months of life^3. Health Canada currently considers that among 19 to 50 years olds, 200 IU/day constitutes a sufficient daily dose of vitamin D. However, recent studies have proposed increasing the recommended dose, up to 400 to 1000 IU/day.

For the sake of your health and that of your baby, it is important to accumulate reserves of vitamin D through exposure to the sun, by eating foods that are rich in vitamin D, and possibly by taking a vitamin D supplement. During the third trimester, while the fetus is accumulating reserves of vitamin D, consider taking a supplement of up to 1000 IU of vitamin D per day.

**Common dietary sources of vitamin D^6**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Vitamin D (IU)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One egg yolk</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriched cow milk (250 ml)</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooked salmon (1 x 120g portion)</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enriched soy milk (250 ml)</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For your information

A study conducted in Ohio, USA, a city situated at a latitude further south than Montreal, concluded that a baby clothed only in a diaper who is exposed to the sun for 30 minutes per week (a little more than 4 minutes per day), or 2 hours per week (around 17 minutes per day) if he or she is completely clothed but without a hat, will synthesize enough vitamin D4. However, several organizations have expressed concerns about sun exposure without sunscreen due to the risk of skin cancer.

Vitamin D supplements

Vitamin D supplements are available over-the-counter in pharmacies. Your midwife or doctor can also prescribe them to you. Certain products on the market, such as Ddrops®, contain no artificial coloring or flavouring. You can purchase these directly or order them from your pharmacy or natural health food store. For more information visit www.ddrops.ca.

References

2Société Canadienne de Pédiatrie : Les suppléments de vitamine D : Recommandations pour les mères et leur nourrisson au Canada www.cps.ca/francais/enonces/ii/fnim07-01.htm#COMITÉ#COMITÉ