

Moonhawk's Musings

Greetings.

This month I have decided to write about vitamin D. We need sun to make this vitamin from cholesterol, but exposure to sun needs to be balanced with the risk of skin cancer. As I write this article south western Australia is experiencing a heat wave complete with high temperatures and extreme UV indices. It is not a time to be out in the sun without adequate sun protection.

The recipe I have chosen is a healthy, low fat fruit loaf. Like all the recipes I provide it is gluten free. Those not sensitive to wheat and/or gluten can substitute wheat based flour for gluten free flour. While not classed as a lush, high calorie food, it should still be eaten in moderation.

Next month I plan to tell you about the herb Echinacea and provide a delicious, low fat pasta sauce – Carter's style.

Have a great month, and remember - drink lots of water in the hot weather.

Wishing you many good things

Moonhawk

The Vitamin D Dilemma

Vitamin D – cholecalciferol (D3), ergocalciferol (D2)

Vitamin D is a sterol or fat soluble vitamin that is derived from cholesterol. It is essential for healthy bone growth through its role in the absorption of calcium and phosphorus, bone mineralisation and maintenance of calcium homeostasis. Being a fat soluble vitamin it is stored in adipose tissue in the body. It is a non-essential vitamin because the body can manufacture vitamin D. A cholesterol-based precursor produced in the sebaceous glands of the skin is converted to vitamin D with the assistance of UVB rays i.e sunlight. So you need sunlight to produce vitamin D. The same sunlight that is known to cause skin cancer. Australia has some of the highest rates of skin cancer. This is where the dilemma is.

The Australian Cancer Council has been promoting the slip, slop, slap message, (slip on a shirt, slop on some sunscreen, and slip on a hat, for the uninitiated), for quite some years now. I don't think anyone can argue that this is anything but wise advice. However, as even low SPF factor sunscreens can block UVB exposure, constantly using sunscreens increases the risk of vitamin D deficiency. Not only does sunscreen increase the risk of vitamin D deficiency, so does wearing thick clothing, e.g 'veiled' women, or spending most of your time indoors, e.g elderly people in hostels or nursing homes, or long stay hospital patients.

So how much sun is enough to increase vitamin D levels? There is considerable controversy around this, but it has been suggested that exposing 10-15% of the body to the sun **before** 10am and **after** 3pm for 10minutes between October and March (in Australia) is sufficient to supply adequate vitamin D. During other months up to 1 hour of exposure is needed (although, I have to say that on a cold Canberra winter day I do not want to expose/uncover any part of me to the sun for any period of time, no matter how sunny it is ☺). This short exposure can be achieved during brief outdoor tasks such as hanging out the washing, or walking to the mailbox, or sitting in the sun reading a book for 10 minutes. Do not make the mistake of 'topping up' our exposure on any one day, as this will increase the risk of sunburn and skin cancer. Stick to the 10-15 minute rule, even the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council (NMHRC) agree that this is adequate sun to keep vitamin D levels up in most healthy people.

Vitamin D is also found in cold water fish oils such as cold, halibut, herring and tuna, egg yolk, sprouted seeds, and foods that have been fortified with vitamin D e.g milk, milk products, some cereals and breads – check the label.

Those most at risk of vitamin D deficiency, i.e people over 50 years of age, people with malabsorption problems such as those seen in coeliac disease, those people who have reduced exposure to the sun, can supplement their diet with vitamin D. However, be aware that ingested vitamin D is only 50-80% bioavailable i.e you will only absorb 50-80% of what you ingest. If you feel that you may be at risk of vitamin D deficiency, consult a health care professional trained in human nutrition. They will be able to assess your vitamin D status and prescribe suitable a supplement. In Australia, contact the [Australian Traditional Medicine Society](#) (ATMS) to find a naturopath, herbalist or nutritionist who can correctly prescribe vitamin supplements.

Reference: Herbs & Natural Supplements: An evidence based guide (2nd Edition), by Lesley Braun and Marc Cohen. The Nutrient Bible (6th Edition), by Henry Osiecki.

Dense Fruit Loaf

This recipe makes a delicious dense, low fat fruit loaf. It can be served as is, or spread with cream cheese or butter – which means it is no longer low fat. I like to freeze it in slices, making it an easy addition to the lunch box or afternoon snack.

Line a 24cm x 12cm loaf tin with baking paper.

Preheat the oven to 180c

200g, dried apricots, roughly chopped	200g dried figs, roughly chopped
200g pitted dates, roughly chopped	100g raisins
500ml water	1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
240g gluten free self raising flour	2 teaspoon mixed spice
115g brown sugar	2 eggs

80ml (2 tablespoons) olive oil.

Put the dried fruit and water in a heavy based pan. Bring slowly to the boil simmer uncovered for 5 minutes, or until most of the water has evaporated. Remove from the heat and add the bicarb. Allow to cool.

In a medium sized bowl mix together the flour and spices.

Mix the brown sugar and eggs into the fruit mix. Pour this into the flour and mix well.

Pour into the lined loaf tin, bake for 50 minutes, or until the skewer comes out clean.

Cool for 5 minutes, then turn onto a wire wrack to cool completely. Slice and eat. I usually get between 12 to 14 good size slices from a loaf, but feel free to cut thicker slices.

For a spicier fruit loaf, substitute 50g of the raisins for 50g of finely chopped glace ginger, and add 1 teaspoon of ground cardamom.

You can also use dried cranberries instead of raisins.

You can also sprinkle sesame or poppy seeds, or pepitas, or sunflower seeds, or even a mix of seeds, on top of the loaf before baking.