



Cod Liver Oil - Standing Tall After All These Years! **By Joanne L. Gordon, ND, PT** **September, 2005**

Cod liver oil's medicinal value has been recorded for almost a century.

In the early 1900s, the health benefits of cod liver oil were widely known for the treatment and prevention of bone diseases like rickets in children and osteomalacia in adults. Now in the 21st century, cod liver oil is still standing tall and is regarded as one of nature's superfoods. The benefits of cod liver oil extend over many health problems with documentation supporting cod liver oil's benefits in the treatment of heart disease, rheumatic disease, inflammatory states, skin disorders, hormonal disorders, and more.

I sometimes think of cod liver oil as a folk remedy because it was used for so many years before scientific research was able to confirm it's health benefits. Just a generation ago, cod liver oil was still being given regularly to children for improved bone health and increased immunity.

Most adults I meet remember taking cod liver oil as a child. They sometimes have unpleasant memories about taking it because of the taste. The classical picture that you may remember is of a young girl holding her nose while taking the oil. Fortunately, the quality of cod liver oil has greatly increased and it is now taken with ease by both adults and children.

Why is cod liver oil good for you?

Cod liver oil is so good for you because it contains essential fatty acids and fat-soluble Vitamins A & D.

Essential Fatty Acids

Essential fatty acids (EFAs) are called *essential* because they are not made in the body. Our bodies are dependent upon outside food sources to provide them with these nutrients. EFAs are also known as omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids. The essential fatty acids present in cod liver oil are eicosanopentaenoic acid (EPA) and decasonopatenenic acid (DHA). These fatty acids are key fats. They are vital to the health of every person because they provide our cells with the necessary building blocks that are required to maintain peak function.

This past year, essential fatty acids got a lot of press because many prescription anti-inflammatories were taken off the market. **Cod liver oil is now at the top of the list as a natural defense against inflammation.** Research has demonstrated that the oils present in cod liver oil help in the reduction of pain and inflammation related to arthritis. The naturally occurring fatty acids present in the oil divert the chief metabolic pathways of inflammation so that less swelling occurs, therefore decreased pain.

Vitamin A

Vitamin A is named retinol due to its high concentration in the retina of the eye. The benefits of Vitamin A extend past its benefits relating to the eyes and night blindness. Vitamin A has an important role in cell differentiation, bone development, reproduction, heavy menstrual periods, immune system function, and cancer prevention.

Cod liver oil is an excellent source for naturally occurring vitamin A. Other foods that are a rich in natural Vitamin A are liver, egg yolks, and butter.

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is often considered the sunshine vitamin because the body is able to make Vitamin D from appropriate sunlight.

The amount and type of sunlight needed to stimulate the body to make enough Vitamin D is dependent upon many factors, including the type of rays from the sun.

There are 3 types of solar rays, and only one, UV-B, supplies us with the necessary energy to produce vitamin D. UV-B rays are present during midday at higher altitudes and latitudes, but the rays can be blocked by clouds, fog, and pollution. One could assume that the average amount of UV-B rays available on a daily basis in the Pacific Northwest is less than optimal, except during summer months.

How much Vitamin D can you get from the sun?

Exposure of the hands, face and arms for 10-20 minutes, three times a week, provides 200-400 IU of vitamin D each time or an average of 100-200 IU per day during the summer months. In order to achieve optimal levels of vitamin D, 85 percent of body surface needs exposure to prime midday sun. Dark skinned people need longer exposure times in the sun to get enough Vitamin D.

Low levels of Vitamin D can cause a myriad of problems.

Low levels of vitamin D can cause bone and muscle pain. The pain may manifest as pain in the legs, muscle weakness and difficulty climbing stairs. Studies have shown that cod liver oil leads to improvement in muscle pain, muscle strength and bone pain scores.

Low levels of Vitamin D have been associated with many other disorders too, including fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, osteoporosis, PMS, infertility, thyroid disorders, cancer, chronic fatigue and depression.

A simple blood test is now available to determine if you are getting enough of the vitamin D in your diet.

My favorite brand of cod liver oil is Carlson's Lemon Flavored Cod Liver Oil. If a patient shows any hesitancy towards taking the oil, I'll explain to them that this cod liver oil is "the fine wine of the cods!" – And when they try it, they usually agree and will continue taking the oil as prescribed. I typically suggest 1 tbsp of cod liver oil per day for adults and 1 tsp per day for children. Cod liver oil is especially beneficial for pregnant and nursing mothers.

The addition of cod liver oil and other healthy fats into your diet will improve your health and well-being. Give it a try and let me know what you think!

Dr. Joanne Gordon is a skilled, compassionate naturopathic physician and physical therapist. She helps people by providing care and attention that goes beyond traditional medicine. Her goal is to uncover the cause of your health problems and treat them, so you can feel better sooner. Her unique way of combining therapeutic herbs, homeopathic remedies, clinical nutrition and physical medicine address your health concerns naturally.

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