



## The D-Health Trial Newsletter

Welcome to our fourth newsletter. We hope you find the information below interesting and informative. We've included answers to some questions that we are asked frequently, but if you've still got questions please don't hesitate to give us a call. We have a team of dedicated and friendly staff who will do their best to answer your questions.

### TIME TO THINK ABOUT SUN PROTECTION

Australia has the dubious honour of being the skin cancer capital of the world. At this time of year it is particularly important to protect your skin from the sun to reduce your risk of skin cancer. There are three main types of skin cancer: melanoma, basal cell carcinoma (BCC) and squamous cell carcinoma (SCC). Melanoma is the least common but the most likely to result in death. BCC and SCC rarely cause death but treatment can require invasive surgery, often resulting in significant scarring. Importantly, the total cost to the Australian government of managing these 'non-fatal' skin cancers is over \$500 million each year.

**Prevention is better than cure and it is never too late to protect your skin from the sun.** When you are outside wear sunglasses, a hat, long sleeves if possible, seek shade and make sure you

apply sunscreen. Research conducted at the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute also suggests that it is beneficial to apply sunscreen to your face, hands and arms every day – even if you don't plan to be outside. You may like to keep some sunscreen in your bathroom and apply it as part of your normal morning hygiene routine.

**But won't wearing sunscreen stop me from making vitamin D?** In theory, sunscreen should block vitamin D production in the skin. Experiments under very controlled conditions in the laboratory suggest that proper application of sunscreen can reduce (but not entirely prevent) vitamin D production. However, studies of people in real life situations show that sunscreen application has a minimal impact on vitamin D.

### ANNUAL SURVEY RETURNS



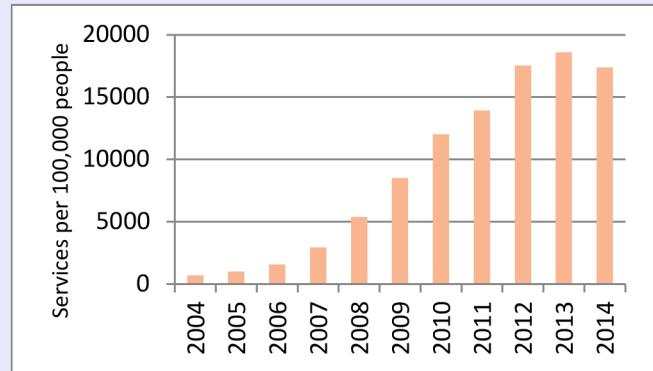
Information that we capture in our annual surveys is extremely important. We use it as one of several ways of finding out if vitamin D supplementation can influence health.

Over 11,000 of our D-Health participants have now been mailed their first annual survey. We are thrilled with the response— about 97% of people are returning the survey in the mail, completing it online or doing it over the phone with one of our staff. We usually send the survey with your new tablets, so keep an eye out for it in your envelope.

# MEDICARE CHANGES THE RULES FOR VITAMIN D TESTING

In the 10 years between the beginning of 2004 and the end of 2013 the number of vitamin D tests per 100,000 people increased from about 700 to over 18,000 (see figure). The Australian government contributed almost \$150 million to vitamin D testing in 2013. A number of reviews have suggested that there is not good evidence that routine vitamin D testing improves health.

As a result, in late 2014 Medicare Australia changed the rules and will now only pay for vitamin D testing if you meet certain criteria. A link to the National Prescribing Service fact sheet can be found on our website ([www.dhealth.qimrberghofer.edu.au/links](http://www.dhealth.qimrberghofer.edu.au/links)). If you would like us to send this to you in the mail please let us know.



Vitamin D tests funded by Medicare between 2004 and 2014.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### **I am going travelling and won't be home when you need to send me my new tablets.**

We send you your new tablets in the month after you take the last tablet in your blister pack. If you are going to be away, please just give us a call. We can either send you your tablets early, or you can miss one tablet and then carry on when you return.



### **I left my tablets in the sun and they have degraded.**

We have plenty of spare tablets. Just discard your old tablets and let us know so we can send you a new pack.

### **I am having trouble reading my annual survey / it is difficult for me to get to the post to return the annual survey**

We are very happy to do your annual survey over the phone with you. Just call us and we can either do it immediately or arrange a time that suits you. It takes about 20 minutes over the phone.

### **I don't agree with the way some of the questions in the annual survey are worded.**

We know that some of the questions seem a bit strange. However, they come from validated surveys so we are unable to change them. If you are having trouble with them please don't hesitate to ask for help.

### **Some of the questions in the annual survey ask about what I did in the last month, but the last month wasn't typical for me.**

That's OK. Still tell us about the last month. One of the advantages of a large trial like the D-Health Trial is that when we average out the information over all participants and across the five years of the trial, these sorts of anomalies don't matter.

### **I've been taking your tablets for a year now and I don't feel any different. I must be taking the placebo.**

We don't necessarily expect you to feel different if you are taking vitamin D. While some people think that taking vitamin D makes them feel better, there is very little solid evidence. We are mainly interested in finding out if taking vitamin D reduces risk of diseases like cancer and heart disease – you wouldn't necessarily feel it if your risk was being reduced.

## COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, CONCERNS?

We love hearing from you, so feel free to call our helpline.

Phone 1300 735 920