

# Dr. Sunshine

Interview by DEBORAH SOLOM

**In your new book, "The Vitamin D Solution," you argue that we have become a culture of sun phobes who fear exposure to direct sunlight and slather on too much sunscreen, which you believe has caused a national epidemic of vitamin D deficiency. Dermatologists have gone so far as to recommend that you should never walk outside without a sunscreen. The American Academy of Dermatology still has that recommendation that you should never be exposed to one ray of direct sunlight without sun protection.**

**Why do they say that?**

They are heavily invested, I think, with the cosmetics industry. The American Academy of Dermatology just had their annual meeting in Miami Beach. It was huge. Many of the major cosmetic companies were there, and they were spending thousands of dollars just to be out there and promote their products to the dermatologists.

**Why would the anti-sun academy hold its annual meeting in Miami Beach, the sun capital of the East?**

That kind of says it all. They still seek the sun, just like everyone else.

**How long does one need to stay in direct sun to absorb 2,000 I.U. of D, your ideal daily dose?**

You don't absorb it. You make it. In the spring, I recommend about 15 to 30 minutes on your arms and legs two to three times a week.

**What if you would rather be dead than walk around New York in gym shorts? Why is exposing your legs so important?**

There's the rule of 9s. You have about 18 percent of your skin surface on each of your legs. Your face is only 9 percent; we never recommend you expose your face. You should always protect it with either sunscreen or an appropriate hat.

**In 2004, you were fired from Boston University's department of dermatology by Dr. Barbara Gilchrest, who was head of the department.**

She called me into her office and said that she couldn't have somebody in her department recommending sun exposure.



**At the time, she also questioned whether your findings had been compromised by money you received from the tanning industry. You received research money from the Indoor Tanning Association. That's not true. The money came from the UV Foundation, a nonprofit arm of the Indoor Tanning Association.**

**You're still at Boston University, where you run the vitamin D lab, right?**

We've been looking at prostate and colon cancer and showing that if you give mice vitamin D, it reduces tumor growth by as much as 40 percent to 50 percent

**What bothers me about your research is the inflated claims you make for it. You say that one pill can prevent and treat everything from cancer to autism to depression. There has never been a medication that did all that.**

I never said autism.

**It's on the cover of your book!**

O.K. There has been an association between vitamin D deficiency and autism. More studies need to be done. What I recommend certainly is that autistic children receive vitamin D, because it improves muscle function.

**Do any vegetables contain vitamin D?**

It turns out, curiously, that mushrooms contain vitamin D. Then, of course, there are the fortified foods, which are principally the dairy products with 100 units of vitamin D per serving.

**Which is why our mothers made us finish our milk. It sounds as if it is almost impossible to get enough D in one's daily diet through food alone.** The bottom line is that everybody should be taking a supplement. I do it, even though I'm out there cycling for an hour or two without sunscreen on my arms and legs.

**In that case, you should be checked for melanoma. Do you have a dermatologist?**

No. I don't have wrinkles. I do a skin survey on myself every couple of months just looking in a mirror.