



namaste health center

## Beat the Winter Blues with Cod Liver Oil

by Alex Muniz

**GARDEN OF LIFE**, long one of *Healthy Living's* favorite companies, has studied the Nordic reliance on cod liver oil and developed Olde World Icelandic Cod Liver Oil accordingly. The supplement uses cod culled only from the frigid waters of the North Atlantic, screens it for heavy metal toxicity, and refrains from deodorizing the oil in order to protect its three essential ingredients: omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin D, and vitamin A.

The 5,000 international units (IU) of vitamin A in each teaspoon-sized serving support immune function, skin health, and eyesight. Omega-3s (along with omega-6s) are what doctors consider "essential fatty acids"; the body cannot produce them on its own. In the proper amount, omega-3s help to promote cardiovascular, brain, and bone health. But thanks to a diet high on processed foods and light on fish, Americans routinely end up with anywhere between 11 to 30 times more omega-6s than omega-3s. That's bad news.

In Sally Fallon and Mary G. Enig's book, *Nourishing Traditions: The Cookbook that Challenges Politically Correct Nutrition and the Diet Dictocrats*, the authors note, "[Too much omega6] can result in increased tendency to form blood clots, inflammation, high blood pressure, irritation of the digestive tract, depressed immune function, sterility, cell proliferation, cancer and weight gain." Olde World Icelandic Cod Liver Oil contains 952 mg of omega-3s in each serving. When taken regularly, the oil can help remedy the omega-6/omega-3 imbalance, and in the process helps to reduce the inflammation associated with heart disease, as well as help maintain healthy cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Indeed, the Food and Drug Administration has even issued a "qualified health claim" in support of research showing omega-3s' abilities to help reduce coronary heart disease (provided patients do not exceed more than two grams of omega-3s daily.). And when it comes to supporting neurological functions, a 1999 Harvard study found omega-3s increase serotonin levels in the same manner as antidepressants. Similarly, in 2002 French researchers discovered elderly patients who ate diets rich in omega-3s were at a much lower risk to develop dementia and other age-related brain conditions.

While omega-3s' myriad advantages certainly support Garden of Life's labeling cod liver oil as "foundational nutrition," it is the oil's 200 IU of vitamin D in each serving that really has us thinking big happy thoughts as we move into wintertime.

### **THE SUNSHINE VITAMIN**

Cod liver oil and a handful of fatty fishes are the only two foods that contain naturally occurring vitamin D in high amounts. The vitamin assists the bloodstream in absorbing calcium and phosphorus, which in turn supports healthy bone and teeth growth, as well as nerve and brain functions.

For decades, people have regarded vitamin D as the "sunshine vitamin." When the skin receives regular amounts of ultraviolet sunshine, it can synthesize up to 20,000 IU of vitamin D out of the body's 7-dehydrocholesterol in about 30 minutes. (One should not ingest that amount of vitamin D, however. It could be quite toxic.) A Harvard School of Public Health study of 50,000 men even found that high vitamin D levels may protect against the development of major cancers.

But when the body receives scant amounts of sunlight or vitamin D-fortified foods, the vitamin's levels can drop dramatically and lead to rickets, osteoporosis, and perhaps even cancer. Nineteenth century doctors in the pre-pasteurization era recognized the prevalence of bone disorders in people growing up in darkened, smog-enshrouded cities. As a remedy, they routinely prescribed cod liver oil and sunshine treatments. Unfortunately for us twenty-first century folk, modern medicine has until recently downplayed the dangers of vitamin D deficiency. Research now indicates that as many as 40 percent of Americans do not possess enough of the vitamin in their bloodstreams.

### **VITAMIN D DEFICIENCIES CAUSE SADNESS**

Alarmingly, bone disorders may be just the tip of the vitamin D deficiency iceberg. There appears to be a strong connection between low vitamin D levels and seasonal affective disorder, wherein people experience lethargy, weight gain, and depression in the low sunlight of the winter months. According to a 1989 paper by the Department of Cell Biology and Anatomy at the University of North Carolina, vitamin D levels can play a critical role in determining mood, and therefore the prevalence of illnesses like SAD. The historical Icelandic embrace of cod liver oil and its ample supplies of vitamin D is no accident!

A 1998 double-blind study of 44 adults by the University of Newcastle in Callaghan, New South Wales, Australia, found daily doses of 400 or 800 IU of vitamin D over the course of five mid-winter days resulted in the subjects experiencing a marked improvement in mood. In 1999, the Department of Medicine at the Union Memorial Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland, compared the effects of a large single dose of 100,000 IU of vitamin D, versus two hours of light therapy undertaken daily for a month. The hospital's researchers discovered significant improvement in the moods of those receiving the one-time 100,000 IU boosts, compared to slight or non-existent gains among the subjects undergoing light therapy. (Although routine doses of vitamin D in the thousand and ten thousands of IU can prove damaging, the human body boasts a large capacity for the vitamin. According to case studies, one would have to ingest in the millions of IU to risk overdose in one sitting.)

Tests like these should have Americans thinking more about how wintertime and vitamin D levels affect their own health. We spend much of our daily lives in artificially lit office buildings; we regularly hear conflicting reports regarding just how much sun we should be getting. All told, the Environmental Protection Agency estimates the average American spends nearly 90 percent of his time indoors. Factor in winter's cold weather and dark skies and this percentage creeps even higher - and with it, the chances for developing SAD, or SAD-like symptoms.

The American Academy of Family Physicians estimates that 6 percent of Americans battle full-blown winter SAD, with another 1 a to 20 percent struggling with more mild symptoms (drowsiness, irritability, etc.). And further complicating matters is the fact that SAD symptoms are three to four times more common in women than in men. How, exactly, the complex interaction of genetics, vitamin D deficiencies, and modern lifestyles affect the intensity and frequency of SAD continues to confound mainstream science.

### **THE NATURAL SOLUTION FOR WINTER HEALTH**

Exercise, improved diet, light therapy, and vitamin D are all common treatments against SAD and the "winter blues." Olde World Icelandic Cod Liver Oil, however, offers you a supplement blend that addresses a range of potential cardiovascular and neurological problem areas at the holistic level.

A daily dose of the cod liver oil's vitamin D protects against the symptoms of SAD, while the oil's omega-3s improve the cardiovascular system and possibly provide their own antidepressant function. Moreover, as essential nutrients, both the omega-3 fatty acids and the vitamin

D stabilize overall health, further preventing the weakening of the immune system that is so common during the winter months. Factor in the oil's all-natural, lemon-mint flavor and extremely high-quality production, and you realize that Garden of Life's Olde World Icelandic Cod Liver Oil is not simply full of essential vitamins - it should be an essential part of every cold winter day.

And for those who wish to get their daily dose of vitamins A and D and omega-3s in capsule form, Garden of Life offers CODmega Wild Fish & Cod Liver Oil capsules, which are especially convenient for travel during the holidays.

## **Women and SAD**

Doctors are still unclear as to why seasonal affective disorder affects women so much more strongly than men. The simple explanation may be that because women are about twice as likely to develop depression as men, their chances of acquiring SAD increase accordingly. Some SAD researchers even speculate that social conditioning and gender roles increase the likelihood of the disorder's development (e.g., mothers spend more time indoors - and out of the sun during the winter months looking after the kids than do their husbands).

## **How Much is Too Much**

Just how much vitamin A and D should you get each day? the recommended daily allowance (RDA) for the former is about 1000 IU, and between 600 - 800 IU for the latter. More than 6000 to 10,000 IU of vitamin A can cause everything from birth defects in pregnant women, to bone fractures. As for Vitamin D, if you start getting into daily doses in the thousands and tens of thousands of IU, you can run the risk of cardiovascular and kidney damage.

## **Signs You're Experiencing SAD**

If you notice the following anxiety symptoms pop up like clockwork, two or more winters in a row, you may want to see a doctor about seasonal affective disorder.

- disturbed sleep patterns
- fatigue, lethargy, trouble focusing on daily routines
- weight gain stemming from persistent cravings for sugary foods and carbs
- extreme mood swings punctuated by feelings of hopelessness or apathy
- irritability and antisocial behavior
- weakened or nonexistent sex drive
- diarrhea, nausea, constipation