

The Sun a potent weapon against cancer?

Source: <http://sci.tech-archive.net/Archive/sci.med.nutrition/2009-02/msg00018.html>

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 - *Date:* Tue, 3 Feb 2009 11:22:35 -0800 (PST)
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Ann Epidemiol. 2009 Feb;19(2):79-83.

A brief history of vitamin d and cancer prevention.

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PURPOSE: To review the history of vitamin D and its use in cancer prevention. **METHODS:** The literature on published studies of vitamin D and its role in human health was reviewed and summarized. **RESULTS:** The modern history of vitamin D began in the mid-1800s, when it was noticed that city children were more likely to have rickets than rural children. Half a century later, Palm reported that children raised in sunny climates virtually never developed rickets. McCollum isolated vitamin D, and Windaus its precursors, receiving the Nobel Prize. Other scientists later observed that people with skin cancer had lower prevalence of nonskin cancers, and that lower overall mortality rates from all internal cancers combined existed in sunnier areas. These observations went largely unnoticed, and the field stagnated until 1970, when maps were created of cancer mortality rates. Through study of these maps, Cedric and Frank Garland of Johns Hopkins University reported a strong latitudinal gradient for colon cancer mortality rates in 1980, and hypothesized that higher levels of vitamin D compounds in the serum of people in the south were responsible, and that calcium intake also would reduce incidence. Edward Gorham and colleagues carried out cohort and nested studies, including the first study that found an association of a serum vitamin D compound with reduced cancer risk. William B. Grant then carried out numerous ecologic studies that extended the vitamin D-cancer theory to other cancers. **CONCLUSIONS:** The history of the role of vitamin D in human health is rich and much of that history is yet to be written not only by scientists, but by policy makers with the vision and leadership necessary to bridge the gap between research and policy.

So if as this study indicates " Other scientists later observed that people with skin cancer had lower prevalence of nonskin cancers, and that lower overall mortality rates from all internal cancers combined existed in sunnier areas....." how many cancer deaths may have been caused by the advice to avoid sun exposure

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