

Beauty

Last week, a rare and beautiful thing happened: British summer finally arrived. One by one, the buildings surrounding *Stylist* HQ emptied, as office dwellers flooded to parks and cafes to bask in lunchtime sun while whole companies knocked off early to camp on the pavements with a glass of Prosecco (or two). British cities rarely look happier than when the sun is shining.

However, as much as we love the sun, being a sun-worshiper has become something of a taboo. Daily high SPF coverage has become the norm while heading to the Maldives without serious cover-ups (Pucci kaftan, dramatic hat, Sisley factor 50) is considered foolish.

But miss out on enough sunshine and you'll also miss out on a big, healthy dose of vitamin D. "Ultraviolet (UV) energy converts a naturally occurring form of cholesterol in your skin into vitamin D3, which is carried to your liver and then your kidneys to transform it to active vitamin D," explains dermatologist Dr Tapan Patel. It's crucial stuff that helps our bodies work properly and that's to say nothing of its impact on our moods. Vitamin D is linked with the creation of serotonin, the happy hormone, and studies are also being conducted into whether low levels of vitamin D can affect conditions such as asthma and diabetes. But it's interest in the anti-ageing benefits of vitamin D that has reached fever pitch in the last 12 months. "Our bones need vitamin D to absorb calcium," explains dermatologist Dr Rachael Eckel. "Bones are the scaffolding that hold the skin and muscles up in our faces. Without [enough vitamin D to strengthen bones] your face can look hollow and skin can sag – something that no anti-ageing cream will be able to rectify."

SKIN SAVIOUR

Waxing lyrical about the benefits of vitamin D is one thing, but consuming a beneficial amount without basking in the sun's rays is quite another. Melanie Brown, a nutritionist specialising in women's health, has tested over 2,000 patients for vitamin D deficiency, and found that just 10% of her clients have the

correct levels for optimum health. "We need it to enhance health and wellbeing, and we're only recently waking up to the fact we could be missing out," she explains.

The trouble is, unlike other vitamins and minerals, vitamin D is made by the body rather than consumed by it, so recommended daily amounts (RDAs) are imprecise. It's estimated that just 10% of the approximate RDA your body needs appears naturally in food, such as oily fish, mushrooms and eggs – meaning you'd have to consume an awful lot of sardines

SMART SPFS

While a little bit of sunshine is beneficial for vitamin D production, the rest of the time you should apply SPF generously and often

FOR EASY TOP-UPS

Brush-On Block SPF30, £23, Susan Posnick

Unlike chemical sunscreens that filter and reduce UV rays, mineral SPF's such as titanium dioxide and zinc oxide reflect them away from the skin. This handbag-friendly brush dispenses the mineral SPF's in their original powder form rather than a sticky cream, making it a must for blemish-prone skin.



FOR ANTI-AGEING

Dermatologist Solutions Ultra Light Daily UV Defense SPF 50 PA + + +, £35, Kiehl's

This high-tech formula employs no fewer than three sunscreen filters to provide a barrier against long UVA ageing rays, which contribute to saggy skin and fine lines.



FOR IMPROVING SKINTONE

Anthelios BB Tinted Comfort Cream SPF50, £16.50, La Roche-Posay

Sunscreen alone can only offer around 98% protection against sun damage. This contains baicalin, the first antioxidant to protect against long UVA, in a formula that evens your skintone.



FOR A MOISTURE BOOST

Summer Oil SPF30, £24, Decléor

After a day in the sun, skin struggles to repair itself and the moisture-sapping effects linger. But this contains monoi oil, which is rich in essential fatty acids to strengthen skin's surface barrier and lock water into the cells at night.



FOR SENSITIVE SKIN

Ambre Solaire Sensitive Nourishing Protective Oil SPF50+, £8.50, Garnier

Replacing thick white zinc formulas are refined hypoallergenic oils – this one even contains polymers to create a shield over your skin, preventing slip-and-slide so your SPF stays true.



the winter months 75% of adults who are most at risk (including pregnant women and those from multi-ethnic backgrounds) have low levels. "Wearing factor 40 and avoiding sun exposure is sensible, but there's a danger this is scaring people into thinking the sun is always dangerous and completely avoiding it," says Dr Martin Saweirs. "It's important not to expose your unprotected skin, but there's a fine balance between educating people about skin cancer and the benefits of getting vitamin D."

BOOST YOUR LEVELS

Yet being able to spot when you're low in vitamin D is not easy, and symptoms (such as tiredness, aching muscles and feeling a bit blue) are often written off as a by-product of our frenetic lives. "Almost everyone is marginally low," says Saweirs. In our erratic climate, the best way to produce more vitamin D is supplements, which is where things get complicated, since you can buy it as vitamin D2 and D3. "Vitamin D3 is better absorbed than vitamin D2 but both are useful," says Dr Carrie Ruxton from the Health Supplements Information Service, who recommends 5-25mg daily. "I recommend buying a specialist vitamin D supplement, as they tend to contain more vitamin D." Try SuperNutrient Vitamin D3 1000IU Supplement, £12.50, Neal's Yard Remedies.

And then there's the question of sunshine, and how much you can really take without damaging your skin. "The amount of time you should expose your skin to UV rays is hugely influenced by skin type," says Professor Charlotte Proby of the British Association of Dermatologists. "If you have fair skin you only need a few minutes of UV exposure, any more and you accelerate the risk of skin ageing, skin cancer and breaking down any vitamin D you've already created. Similarly, if you're dark skinned you'll need more UV exposure. But it's essential to know your own skin and not let yourself burn." Dr Patel suggests, "exposing just your forearms to the sun for 10-15 minutes three times a week to boost levels." You don't even need to be outside; you can absorb UV rays through windows.

So the next time you're thinking of eating lunch at your desk, head to your nearest large window or the park with a wide brimmed hat instead. After all, it is good for you...



PHOTOGRAPHY: KT AULETIA/TRUNKARCHIVE.COM, STOCKISTS: DECLÉOR (DECLÉOR.CO.UK), GARNIER (GARNIER.CO.UK), KIEHL'S (KIEHL'S.CO.UK), LA ROCHE-POSAY (ROOTS.COM), SUSAN POSNICK (INNECODE.CO.UK). IT IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW YOUR OWN SKIN TYPE AND PROTECT YOURSELF FROM SKIN DAMAGE. NEVER LET YOURSELF BURN.