The Sunny Side of Vitamin D: 
Promoting Bone Health and Preventing Osteoporosis

Worldwide, every 3 seconds a bone will break.
That is a startling statistic according to the International Osteoporosis Foundation that estimates 1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men over 50 will experience osteoporotic bone fractures at some point in their lives.

What is osteoporosis?
Osteoporosis is a disease that causes bones to become porous or full of small holes – so they have less structural support and become brittle and fragile and easily breakable. The bones in the back, hip, and forearm are especially prone to this disease. Osteoporosis can be very painful and lead to disability.

How can you prevent osteoporosis?
You help prevent osteoporosis by building better, stronger, denser bones. A few healthy lifestyle choices will help:
• Eat foods rich in calcium - like dairy, leafy greens, and salmon.
• Get the right amount of Vitamin D - in your food, as a supplement, from the sun.
• Be physically active - try walking, climbing stairs, or dancing.
• Get a medical checkup - some medications and hormone levels can affect bone loss.
• Limit alcohol and don’t smoke - these contribute to weak bones.

What does vitamin D and eating the right foods have to do with healthy bones?
Eating foods rich in calcium and phosphorus - like dairy, salmon, white beans, soybeans, dark leafy greens, and broccoli - helps build bone density and helps bones stay strong. Vitamin D is important to help the body absorb the calcium and phosphorus - the minerals that form bone cells for strong, healthy bones. In children, a sufficient amount of vitamin D helps prevent rickets, a condition of weak or soft bones that may include bowed legs or stunted growth. In older adults,
vitamin D helps prevent osteomalacia or bone softening, as well as the onset of osteoporosis and fractures associated with weak bones. Vitamin D is also important important in cell growth, neuromuscular and immune function, and reducing overall inflammation.

**Where do we get most Vitamin D?**
Most vitamin D is made within our skin, in a form called cholecalciferol, also known as vitamin D3. The only way our skin is able to produce vitamin D3 is through exposure to the sun’s ultraviolet B rays. It only takes about 10-15 minutes of sun per day on your face, arms, and hands to produce the vitamin D3 that we need. Where you live, the time of day, the season, wearing sunscreen, and even the color of your skin have an impact on how much vitamin D3 you actually produce from sunlight.

**Not enough sunny days lately?**
Not to fear, some vitamin D can be found in food sources. Vitamin D can be found in egg yolks and fatty fish such as salmon, mackerel, tuna, and sardines. Vitamin D is also added to some foods in the United States – mainly milk, orange juice, and breakfast cereals. When shopping, the vitamin list on the nutrition facts label will state if the product includes any vitamin D.

**How much vitamin D do we really need?**
The recommended daily allowance (RDA) of vitamin D for people between the ages of 1-70 is at least 600 IU of vitamin D per day; those over 70 should take in at least 800 IU of vitamin D per day. Infants under age 1 need about 400 IU per day. Some people may be at risk of vitamin D deficiency and should consider taking a vitamin D supplement. People at risk may include breastfeeding moms, infants, and older adults; people with dark skin or limited sun exposure; people with inflammatory bowel disease or fat malabsorption; and those who are obese or have undergone gastric bypass surgery.

**Start building better bones now.**
It’s never too late to start building up your bone strength. Along with a healthy diet and physical activity, be sure you get your vitamin D, so you can help tackle osteoporosis. After all, you need to take care of your body – it’s where you have to live!