

Should You Get Your Vitamin D From Sun Exposure?— And 3 More Confusing Health Issues, Answered

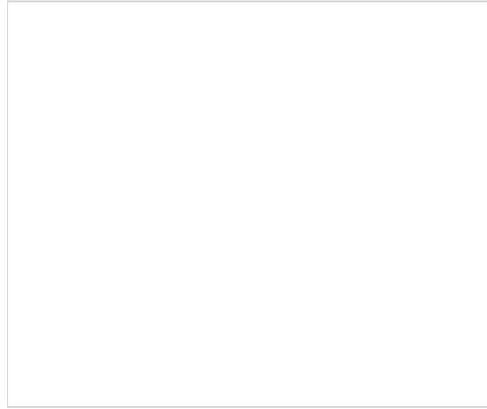
By [Judy Koutsky](#) Jan 26, 2016



It can feel impossible to stay current on health issues when every other day new and conflicting advice comes out. Take [vitamin D](#)—we absorb it best from the sun, but no expert would ever tell you to go outside without sunscreen. And yet so many of us are deficient in it, and our low levels could even be connected with heart disease and cancer. ([Sign up to get daily healthy living tips delivered straight to your inbox!](#))

So what are we supposed to do?

Below, we looked at common tricky health issues and spoke to experts to get to the bottom of them. (But here's some universal advice: Always talk to your doc. "Your primary care physician should be your main source for health advice. She knows you, your condition, and your family history," says Marc I. Leavey, MD, a primary care physician affiliated with [Mercy Medical Center](#) in Baltimore.)



The Issue: Red wine and resveratrol



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You've probably come to think of [red wine](#) as a healthy beverage—all those antioxidants, right? [Some research](#) does suggest that resveratrol, a polyphenol found in red wine, among other things, has some cancer-fighting powers. But then again, the [National Cancer Institute](#) has analyzed extensive studies that show a strong scientific link with alcohol consumption and many cancers, including breast, liver, and esophageal.

The Bottom Line: If you're not currently a drinker or have issues with alcohol abuse, then adding red wine to your repertoire is definitely not the answer. "But if you're currently drinking a glass of wine at dinner, switching to red and practicing moderation could be beneficial to your health," notes Tory Tedrow, RD, a certified nutrition support clinician with [Content Checked](#), an app for people with dietary restrictions.

The Issue: Vitamin D and the sun



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Unless you've been living under a rock, you've heard that we all have a [vitamin D deficiency](#), and we need it—bad. "The sun is an effective way to get this important nutrient, but both sun damage and skin cancer are real risks, especially in those with pale skin," notes [Alan M. Dattner, MD](#), a holistic dermatologist with offices in New York City and New Rochelle, NY. So yes, studies show that the sun is a good source of vitamin D, but at what cost?

The Bottom Line: Those with a family or personal history of melanoma should limit their sun exposure

and get vitamin D through other means. A dietary supplement or foods high in vitamin D could be the answer—the [Mayo Clinic](#) recommends trying to get it through food sources first, and through a supplement if you aren't able to get enough. "Good food sources of vitamin D include cod liver oil; fatty fishes such as herring, catfish, salmon, or halibut; oysters; and foods fortified with vitamin D, such as milk and orange juice," says Tedrow. For those without a history of melanoma, just 10 to 15 minutes of [sun exposure](#) three times a week is enough for your body to get the vitamin D it needs.

The Issue: Fish and mercury

Omega-3s: good! Mercury: bad! And then there's the whole issue of how we're catching fish at a rate much faster than they can reproduce. So how much [fish](#) are we supposed to be eating? And which ones do we avoid altogether?

The Bottom Line: Some types of fish can be great for you: Wild salmon is rich in heart- and brain-healthy omega-3s, oysters contain high levels of zinc, and mussels are loaded with iron. Aim for 8 ounces per week. For guidelines, check out the [Monterey Bay Aquarium's "Super Green" list](#), which highlights fish that are low in mercury and high in omega-3s.

MORE: [12 Fish To Stay Away From](#)

The Issue: Blood clots and the pill



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There has long been controversy surrounding blood clots and birth control pills, particularly those containing drospirenone, a synthetic form of progesterone, like Yasmin and Yaz. A 2015 study published in the *BMJ* found that women using the Pill had up to a fourfold increased risk of developing clots, compared with women who didn't use any form of contraception. But birth control pills are still considered to be a safe form of contraception. So should you really fill the prescription? (Or try a [non-hormonal method](#)?)

The Bottom Line: In a case like the *BMJ* study, it's important to look at the overall numbers. "Yes, there's an increase in the relative risk, meaning the risk of blood clots doubles compared to using no birth control, but the *absolute* risk of a blood clot is extremely low in women with no other risk factors," says Sally Rafie, PharmD, an assistant clinical professor of health sciences at the University of California, San Diego Skaggs School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences. "The risk of blood clots may go from 3 to 6 women, but that's out of 10,000 women." Looking at both the relative and absolute risk is key to understanding studies like these. The best advice when it comes to birth control? Talk to your ob-gyn. She'll factor in your lifestyle, family history, and other risk factors to best advise you on the right protection.

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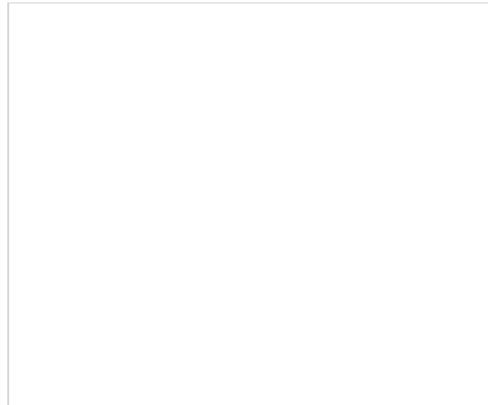
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