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Mushrooms the new Vitamin D sunshine

Vitamin D deficiencies in the elderly, nursing home residents, dark skinned residents, veiled women and their children could become a thing of the past, with US research now suggesting mushrooms have the potential to be a significant source of vitamin D.

The preliminary research finding that a single serving of white button mushrooms contained well in excess of the daily required intake of vitamin D after being exposed to UV light for just five minutes after harvesting, has been welcomed by the Australian industry.

The finding follows recent public warnings in Australia of the re-emergence of rickets in children and the development of guidelines for general practitioners and consumers on maintaining strong bones.

While Australians are generally cautious of too much exposure to the sun, medical experts have warned that some groups of people are now compromising their health by failing to take in enough Vitamin D.

Although high dose Vitamin D supplements are available in the US, Europe, Asia and New Zealand they are not available in Australia, making natural food based sources such as mushrooms all the more important for some consumers.

Details of the initial research were presented this week at the US Food and Drug Administration annual science forum.

While mushrooms currently only have negligible amounts of vitamin D under normal growing conditions the research highlights that exposing growing mushrooms to artificial UV light can cause the level of vitamin D to increase substantially.

Australian Mushroom Growers Association General Manager, Greg Seymour said while Australians gain most of their required Vitamin D intake from sunshine increasing the natural levels of vitamin D in mushrooms would potentially provide consumers with a range of benefits.

Mr Seymour said the latest research suggests that Vitamin D not only helps to keep bones strong but it may also play a role in reducing the risk of a range of diseases including osteoporosis, diabetes and some cancers.

"Rather than fortifying products to help boost daily intake, we may well have the opportunity to provide consumers with mushrooms that are a naturally strong source of vitamin D."

Mr Seymour said while the research is only preliminary at this stage the findings add to the growing reputation of mushrooms has a natural source of vitamins and minerals.



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"Mushrooms already provide a healthy dose of essential B group vitamins - thiamine, riboflavin, niacin and folate - and contain a range of essential minerals such as copper, phosphorus and potassium.

"Combine the latest preliminary findings with research showing that mushrooms have one of the strongest antioxidant effects of all foods and you have a compelling argument for adding mushrooms to every meal or regularly including mushrooms in your diet," he said.

Mr Seymour said while he would watch the ongoing research into the vitamin D properties of mushrooms with interest it won't be evaluated in Australia until further applied research work is carried out.

"Consumers looking to maintain good health are looking to eat a wide range of natural foods that not only taste good but are good for them – and research is showing that mushrooms fit the bill neatly," he said.

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