Getting Started and Succeeding with the low vitamin A Diet

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Disclaimer

The statements herein are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent disease. The information provided is for educational purposes only and is not meant to substitute for the advice provided by your doctor or other health care professional.

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Introduction

This is a short guide to getting started with the low vitamin A diet. Hopefully it can help you with both getting started and in achieving long term success. The low vitamin A diet is not complicated. On the contrary, it is rather straightforward. There are just a few guiding principles and concepts you need to understand to apply it successfully. However, the journey can be long, so please consider this to be somewhat of a travel guide.

How it all started

If you are completely new to the topic of vitamin A, here's a quick synopsis of the current science on it.

Vitamin A is a fat-soluble vitamin, and is considered essential to support vision, tissue maintenance, and life. Basically, the current science claims that if you get too little of it, you'll die. So why on earth would you want to adopt a low vitamin A diet then? Well, that's where the other side of the story comes in. The current science on it also says that if you get too much vitamin A it can indeed make you very sick, and yes it can even kill you. So, it's basically a chameleon type molecule. Get too little, you get sick and die. Get too much and you also get sick and die. Do you think that just maybe someone got their wires cross on it so-to-speak? I sure did. That's why I wrote my eBooks on the topic. However, they are very long, and you don't need to read them. The primary intention of my two eBooks was to make a compelling case regarding the botched science of vitamin A and have other people join me in trying to prove that. I've somewhat succeeded in doing that. There are more than a thousand people from around the world who have tried applying a low vitamin A diet to improve their health.

Paola Dziwetzki has described so-called "vitamin A" as being humanity's kryptonite. I completely agree with her. I believe that this horrible and disgusting vitamin imposter is largely responsible for decimating human health worldwide over the last 50 years. I've referred to vitamin A as being insidious. Here are some things that make it so:

- Its toxicity risk is masked by the "it's a vitamin" label, with the inherent assumption that vitamins are generally safe and good for us
- It is in nearly all our foods
- It is also supplemented into many of our foods
- It very slowly bioaccumulates in our bodies
- It very slowly attacks our stem cells, bones, and other tissues throughout the body

Vitamin A isn't the only thing making us sick

Although I believe chronic vitamin A toxicity is responsible for a lot of chronic disease, it is by no means the only thing that is making us sick. There are many other factors, and potential other toxins, causing or contributing to chronic disease in our society. Some obvious other factors are chronic stress, generally poor diets overall, medications, supplements, poor sleep, lack of exercise, seclusion and loneliness, etc.

Is it a vitamin or is it not?

One of the key claims about so-called vitamin A is exactly that, of it being a vitamin. Much of my effort and focus over the years has been to try to disprove that claim. Of course, from a scientific perspective this is a very important point to prove either way. Correspondingly, to have any hope of stopping the near worldwide vitamin A fortification programs we'd also need to scientifically disprove the "it's a vitamin" claim. I don't know if that can happen in my lifetime.

However, practically speaking, you don't need to get too hung up in the debate of it being a vitamin or not. All you need to know is that an excess of vitamin A, and especially so an excess accumulation of vitamin A, can be harmful. There's no debating that statement, or controversy about it.

Success stories / Non-success stories

Over the years there have been a lot of good success stories with people using a low vitamin A diet to improve their health. However, there have also been a lot of non-success stories (failures) as well. Therefore, this is not a sure-fire solution for everyone. In all honesty, I'd say the results so far are rather mixed. Except, I suspect that many of the non-success stories have been due to people taking dubious and risky supplements. However, that's by no means the only reason for the non-success stories either. There are a lot of factors in the complex equation of human health. Everyone's situation is unique. Chronic vitamin A toxicity is absolutely not the root cause of everyone's health issues. None-the-less, I think most people can still benefit from adopting a lower vitamin A diet.

The Timeframe

One of the first questions people ask when considering taking on a low vitamin A diet is:

How long will it take before I see results?

The real answer is that it depends, and it depends on a lot of factors. It depends on your current state of health, your health and dietary history, your medication history, your age, your weight, your lifestyle, where you live, etc., etc…

To try to generalize it, some people report feeling an improvement in their health within the first 3 to 6 to 12 months. Except, to be clear, that's just the starting point. This is not a quick fix. Most people didn't get sick overnight, and they're definitely not going to get better overnight either.

You really need to think of this as being a multiyear process. You might see good results in one year, or it might take three or more years. It's all going to depend on your unique situation. However, you most certainly should see at least some positive results in the first year. But if you are not seeing any positive results after say two years then I'd suspect that chronic vitamin A toxicity is not the root cause of your health issues.

Some other observations I've made is that younger people seem to make the most improvements the fastest. And, quite paradoxically, some older guys my age seem to make great progress as well. Unfortunately, people who have taken Accutane et al (the retinoic acid form of vitamin A) seem to have a very hard time reversing the damage from that drug.

None-the-less, when considering the timeframe, I think it's best to plan on making the low vitamin A diet a very long-term lifestyle change.

The bioaccumulation of vitamin A

A very important concept to understand is the long-term bioaccumulation of vitamin A in the human body. Although much (~85%) of the bioaccumulation of vitamin A is occurring in the liver, it is not just in the liver either. It is also occurring in the adipose, and other tissues as well. Consider this graphic showing the bioaccumulation in the liver as we age.

Note: the images and the age numbers I've given them are just illustrative and an approximation. Regardless, we should be thinking about this accumulation in terms of decades, and not just a few years.

In my blog post on fatty liver disease: 100 Million Americans now have NAFLD, I stated that even a child could figure out the root cause of it. Regardless, no one can deny that the progression of the liver turning from its natural maroon color to this sickly puke yellow is definitely not a good thing to have going on.

The liver, often referred to as the body's primary detoxification organ, is responsible for a multitude of functions, including the metabolism of nutrients, the synthesis of enzymes and proteins, and the filtration of toxins. Its capacity to perform these functions can be significantly degraded with time due to toxic overload. That's also not a good thing. Although roughly 1 in 2 adults over age 40 in North America likely have some degree of fatty

liver infiltration, most of it is undiagnosed. Therefore, you of course may or may not have the condition. Please don't go jumping to conclusions. Rather just consider the long timeframes involved here and plan on either reversing that condition or avoiding it in the future.

Stay calm, no need to panic

Some people have stated that I'm spreading fear, and have people being somewhat alarmed about the potential of chronic vitamin A toxicity. Well, no I am not. It's actually the opposite. I'm spreading hope.

Humans (and all mammals) have been dealing with potential vitamin A toxicity for many thousands of years. It's not a new phenomenon. Your body is very well adapted and prepared for this. That is one of the reasons we have this large and highly developed liver to take care of it. So, no, there's really nothing new here to get alarmed about. The only new change here is just the vastly increased concentration of vitamin A in our daily food environment. And that's somewhat easily managed.

Therefore, rather than fear, this should be a very good news story. I think it offers genuine hope to a lot of people who have been struggling with a lifelong chronic disease, and especially so for people with the so-called autoimmune diseases.

The mechanism of action - how and why excessive vitamin A can make us sick.

There are multiple chapters in my eBooks describing the mechanism of action of vitamin A toxicity. In a nutshell, there are really two distinct, yet concurrent, mechanisms of toxicity. One is the perverse influence on rapid stem cell proliferation and differentiation, leading to eventual depletion of stem cells and the eventual breakdown of tissue structure. The other mechanism is malformed protein synthesis. Although vitamin A is claimed to *regulate* protein synthesis, I believe that claim is completely botched science. Rather, vitamin A is causing dysfunctional and defective protein synthesis. Please also see my Protein Synthesis blog post for more details on this topic.

What is a low vitamin A diet?

The low vitamin A diet is rather simple in concept. It is just reducing or minimizing your daily vitamin A intake from all sources.

The current RDA (recommended daily amount) is around 900 mcg RAE (equivalent to 3,000 IU). I feel the low vitamin A diet should target getting down to one tenth that amount or less. How low you decide to go is up to you. I'm a bit mixed on it. Going cold turkey near

zero vitamin A intake like what I have done is probably not the best strategy. I think doing so can lead to the liver too aggressively trying to expel stored vitamin A. If that happens too quickly it may cause the so-called "detox setback" some people have encountered.

Therefore, people might be better off to ease their way into lowering their vitamin A intake. Then, over the longer term I think people should be shooting for a very low daily intake. However, people should not get too obsessed about it either. As I've stated above, your body is very well equipped to deal with a moderate amount of vitamin A.

What can I eat?

Eat whatever you want, just stay away from what I refer to as the big-ticket vitamin A foods. Here's a partial list of foods I'd categorize as big-ticket vitamin A items:

Big-ticket vitamin A Animal sourced foods

- Liver
- Cod Liver oil
- Liver pills
- Kidney
- Yellow butter
- All dairy that is fortified with vitamin A
- Many cheeses - Other dairy products are borderline - you decide
- Eggs

Big-ticket vitamin A Plant sourced foods

- Sweet potatoes
- Bell peppers
- Tomatoes
- Pumpkin
- Orange carrots
- Spinach
- Mangos
- Juiced vegetables
- Kale
- Seed oils
- Many spices
- More, just beware the brightly coloured fruits and vegetables

All the above foods are off the menu forever. Although some seed oils may technically have low or moderate concentrations of vitamin A, they are especially bad because that vitamin A content is preabsorbed into the oil making it highly bioavailable.

In summary, the basic food guidelines are:

From animal foods:

- Muscle meats only.
- White fats are generally good. Yellow fats are not good.

From plant foods:

- Most of the brightly coloured and dark green plants are off the menu. But, yes, there are a few exceptions too.
- Plain and white or tan coloured grains and starches are generally fine.

With that basic guideline, it's up to you to decide what you want to include in your diet. You also don't need to lock in your food choices. Obviously, with time you'll find what's working, what's not and make the adjustments to your liking etc. If you don't know if a food is high or low in vitamin A, just search it up in Google or one of the many online nutrition databases. There's a large discussion of foods and diets on my forum. There are also a few low vA cookbooks available.

A basic getting started diet:

As I've stated in a few of my blog posts, I think an all-muscle meat (steak, roasts, ground beef, etc.) carnivore style diet can be a good starting point. This is especially true if, in addition to regaining your health, you want to lose weight. Please read my Obesity Causation v 2.0 blog post for a more in-depth explanation as to the mechanism.

The general success rate with the carnivore diet also seems to be quite high. I view it as being almost the ideal low vitamin A, and low toxin diet. I also think that the higher fat content of the diet is very beneficial as well. I somewhat regret not trying the carnivore diet myself. Conversely, I think people might end up eating too much meat on the carnivore diet. But that is just speculation on my part. Maybe there's no such thing as too much meat? I don't know. However, some people might not have the budget for an all-meat diet either. So, in no way is the carnivore style diet required for doing a low vitamin A diet. It's just a suggestion. You decide what's right for you.

I also know that some people just can't eat beef (red meat) so they'll need to find an alternative that works for them. Chicken and turkey might be just fine, albeit with a cautionary warning not to consume the typically yellow chicken fat.

However, unlike the regular carnivore diet, most dairy products are off the menu on a low vitamin A diet. Except, there are not super hard and fast rules regarding eliminating all dairy either. Some people are including yogurts. You decide what's best for you.

Therefore, if you don't want to start with a carnivore style diet that's perfectly okay. Many of the staple grains are just fine on a low vitamin A diet. These would be things like breads, pastas, white potatoes, white and brown rice, oats, oatmeal, buckwheat etc. Some people do fine with beans, some people can't tolerate them. Once again, I'm not making recommendations, you decide what's best for you. However, I now consider most commercially processed white wheat flour in Canada to be unsafe due to its fortification with niacin. For Canadians reading this, The Real Canadian Super Store has an organic whole wheat flour that is not fortified with niacin.

As for fruits, apples are a great choice. So too would be grapes, strawberries, pears (not Asian pears though), and even bananas.

Restriction or Discipline?

When trying to introduce the low vitamin A diet to a few people in my own social circle their response was something like:

"Oh no, I can't do that, it's way too restrictive. I like food too much."

I have to say, I can't understand that response. In my mind, if you have a choice between remaining sick and tired, or regaining your health regardless of the "restriction" I'd say it's a no-brainer. Also, I feel that they should not be thinking of low vitamin A diets as being too restrictive. Rather, I think they should think about this as simply applying discipline.

Let's imagine you want to train for being really good in a sport, pick your sport, but let's just use hockey as an example here. What are you going to need to do? Well, to succeed you'll need discipline. You'll need to get up early in the morning and go to the arena to practice. And you'll need to do this at least 3 or 4 days a week and keep it up for many years before you get to be very good at it. It's simply discipline. Discipline, not restriction, is yielding the results. The same applies to the low vitamin A diet, its applying discipline, not restriction.

Of course, the opposite of "restriction" is freedom. Being chronically sick is a restriction. Being truly healthy is freedom. Having painful, stiff and creaky joints is a restriction. Having strong, nimble and smooth joints is freedom. Having chronic fatigue and brain fog is a restriction. Having a clear and sharp mind is freedom. Being sore and weak is a

restriction. Being pain free and physically strong is freedom. Well, you get the idea. Focus on freedom, and that freedom comes from applying discipline, not restriction.

Calcium and electrolytes

As stated above, most dairy is off the menu with a low vitamin A diet. Unfortunately, the side-effect of that is eliminating one of our more common sources of dietary calcium. Additionally, a typical low vitamin A diet of just meat and starches can also be low in calcium. Consequently, some people have recently reported developing a calcium deficiency after years of being on their low vitamin A diet.

Some people, including myself, are getting their calcium from mineral water. Some people are getting their calcium from eggshells. Some are getting it from yogurt. Regardless of the source, you need to make sure to get an adequate amount of calcium from ***somewhere***. How much is up to you. The RDA is ~ 1000 mg for an adult. You also need to know that most adults are losing somewhere between 200 and 300 mg per day via poop and pee. If you are chronically diseased, or are chronically inflamed, that daily loss can be even higher. So, you'll probably need your daily intake to be more than that amount. I'm not going to make a recommendation. Again, you decide what's best for you.

Somewhat likewise for the common electrolytes of magnesium and potassium. There are some good YT videos posted by people in the carnivore community on how to make your own DIY electrolyte drinks. Once again, you decide what's best for you.

The Secrets to Success

Slow and steady wins

A key concept for succeeding with the low vitamin A diet is that slow and steady wins. Conversely, if you try to accelerate the process too much then that can easily backfire on you. There's a lot of vitamin A stored in the human liver, and in the human adipose tissues as well. Except, it is also mostly ***safely*** stored there. Whereas, if it was all released into the bloodstream over say a few days that could easily kill you. So, you need to be careful and treat it with respect. You need to let your body deal with it slowly and safely. This is why taking certain supplements can be a disaster.

Expect some bumps and setbacks along the way

Some people have sailed right along with a low vitamin A diet and have just progressively improved their health. Whereas other people haven't. It is somewhat common for people to experience regressions and setbacks along the way. Please see my Tackling the Detox Setback blog post for more on this topic.

I think including more fat in your diet is a good way to avoid having a serious setback. I think this is why the success rate in the carnivore diet is quite high. Although I used bison meat in my diet, I did that primarily because bison is reported to have 0 IUs of vitamin A. So, I did that mostly for trying to prove a scientific point. Whereas the downside to bison is that it is generally very low in fat. I think it's too low. Therefore, beef, with its higher fat content, is a better option.

The importance of exercise

We all know that exercise is important to our health. I don't know how well the actual mechanisms of the how and why of it are fully understood. However, I suspect two of the important ones are the proper use and metabolism of insulin, and the regular release of growth hormones. Regardless, the real-world results are clear and obvious. So, it's important to move your body and exercise daily. Except, like with everything, you also need to be very careful and not overdo it either. Too much exercise, or very strenuous exercise causing highly elevated blood circulation rates can stir up more retinyl esters into circulation. Therefore, don't push yourself too hard in the early stages. Even just daily walking would be an ideal starting point for many people.

The importance of good quality sleep

Obviously getting regular good quality sleep is critically important. I think it is especially so when we are sick. I view sleep as the active phase of the day where the body repairs and rebuilds itself. Therefore, people should regard quality sleep as being just as important, and maybe even more important than their diet. Having suffered from chronic fatigue myself I know how brutal that condition can be, and how nearly impossible it is to get adequate sleep. So, I understand what some people are dealing with. I don't have any recommendations other than try to do whatever you can to make quality sleep a top priority.

Keep emotional and physical stress to a minimum

As with sleep, it is very important to keep your emotional and physical stress to a minimum. Stress increases your cortisol levels. Persistently elevated cortisol levels can be very quickly and absolutely devastating to your health. I believe that persistently elevated cortisol levels can be far more damaging to your health than even persistently elevated vitamin A levels.

Activated Charcoal

As with including a higher fat content in your diet I also think activated charcoal can be very beneficial. Please see my Tackling the Detox Setback blog post for more on this topic. I

don't consider activated charcoal to be a supplement. It is simply used as a binder to capture some of the vitamin A that ends up being circulated in the lower digestive tract.

Blood and Plasma donations

The most direct way to remove some of the vitamin A from your body is making whole blood and plasma donations. Of course, these procedures only reduce the vitamin A that's in circulation. There's no way you're going to drain your liver of its vitamin A storage by making these donations. However, over time, as you progress with a low vitamin A diet, and as you lose fat, more and more vitamin A will indeed be seeping into your blood. And that's exactly where we don't want it. But, in no way are blood and plasma donations the magic solution. However, I think they are helpful, and every little bit of vitamin A removed from the body adds up over time.

Some people claim plasma donations are not safe. Are they absolutely 100% safe? No, but almost nothing in life is 100% safe. However, since there are about 53 million plasma donations made each year in the USA, that is a good indicator that they are generally safe. Also, there is some social / community good in making blood and plasma donations. You decide what's best for you.

Track what you are eating

It's important to keep track of what you are eating. You can either do this in a written food journal or with an application on your phone. I found using an app on my phone to be very convenient. It also had the benefit of automatically calculating and tracking my daily vitamin A intake. Another important reason to track what you are eating is that you are very likely going to be adding or removing foods from your diet over time. Like myself, and others have reported it as well, you'll probably notice that once you eliminate most other food-based toxins from your diet, you'll find yourself to be more sensitive to small changes in your diet. Meaning, you will probably more easily notice and detect that a certain food is causing you trouble. It's like conducting a science experiment where you are changing just one variable at a time, rather than a bunch of variables.

However, there's also going to be a delay in the negative or positive response to a food change. It might be several weeks later, or several months later. This is where your food journal comes in. It will help you go back in time and identify what you added or removed that accounts for that change.

Please see my blog post on Niacin for an example of what happened to me. I would have never been able to make this determination if I was eating a bunch of random and untracked foods.

Mineral water

As stated above, you need to get your calcium from somewhere. I think mineral water is a good option. Mineral water also provides some of the other trace minerals. Using a diet tracking app can help you monitor how much you are getting for each of them.

Supplements

Stay away from dubious and risky supplements - all of them. You can easily get most of your nutrition from food. The claim that the soil is depleted, and therefore you need supplements is mostly bullshit, and just marketing hype.

My golden rule would be to never, ever, buy supplements from the same practitioner who's recommending or prescribing them to you. That puts them into a direct conflict of interest. If they really think you need a supplement, then they should be perfectly okay with you buying it somewhere else. Don't buy into their BS that only theirs is the super special version. That's just more marketing and sales.

To be very clear, I'm not making some blanket claim that all supplements are bad or not needed. There may indeed be supplements that are helpful, or even necessary.

In my recent blog post on risky Supplements I stated:

"But you really need to do the risk / benefit analysis on it. As with any supplement you first need to be very, very sure that you truly need it. Then you need to be especially sure that it's not going to cause you harm in both the short and long term. ...

Please use your own critical thinking and decide what's right for you."

If you are including even a moderate amount of meat in your low vitamin A diet then I think it is very unlikely you need to supplement with zinc, niacin, nicotinic acid, or selenium. Also, I think that supplementing with any of these is potentially risky and therefore often counter productive.

Beware the so-called "experts"

Don't buy into someone claiming to be an "expert" in vitamin A toxicity, and detoxification. As far as I'm concerned, there are currently no such experts.

Don't get sucked into the "*Leaking Toxic Bile Theory / Paradigm*" hype. Please see my post on it here. I think it is mostly marketing bullshit used to push pills etc. Realistically, I think a very small percentage of people have toxic bile "leaking" into their blood. Obviously, attempting to treat a condition you don't have is just a very bad idea. And it's an especially bad idea to attempt to treat a non-existent condition with dubious and risky supplements. If you feel you actually do have a toxic bile "leaking" into the blood condition, then please consult with your professional MD. And not with *"just some guy on the internet"*.

Conversely, I do believe there are a lot of people with retinyl esters slowly leaking into their blood. Except those retinyl esters are mostly leaking directly from the liver and fat, and not via the bile.

Motivational and additional support

Most people take on the low vitamin A diet to improve their health in the near term. However, you should also be thinking long-term. Your long-term success should be one of your biggest motivators. Think of this being a long-term investment plan in your future health. Think of how well you could be doing when you're in your 70's, 80's and 90's. If you've read my eBooks, you'll know that I have very little doubt that vitamin A is one of the key contributors causing Alzheimer's / dementia. And, I have absolutely zero doubt about it. If you need more motivational support, just have a good long hard think about that.

Pair up with a buddy or partner in taking on this diet. Join my forum. It's free. If you feel you'd still benefit from one-on-one support, that's fine of course too.

I'm now also offering one-on-one consulting on a paid basis. If you'd like to work with me directly, or just want to talk things through, please email me: livingvafree@gmail.com or using my Contact Me page here and I'll send you the details.

Contributing back

If you decide to take on a low vitamin A diet, please share your results, both good and bad. You can share progress reports on my forum.

Sharing your experience may help others and help contribute to the science on it. Please stay far away from the hyped up "*miracle*" supplements and the so-called "*experts*" pushing them. I'd sure like to see more people prove success is found in the less and not more of something approach.