

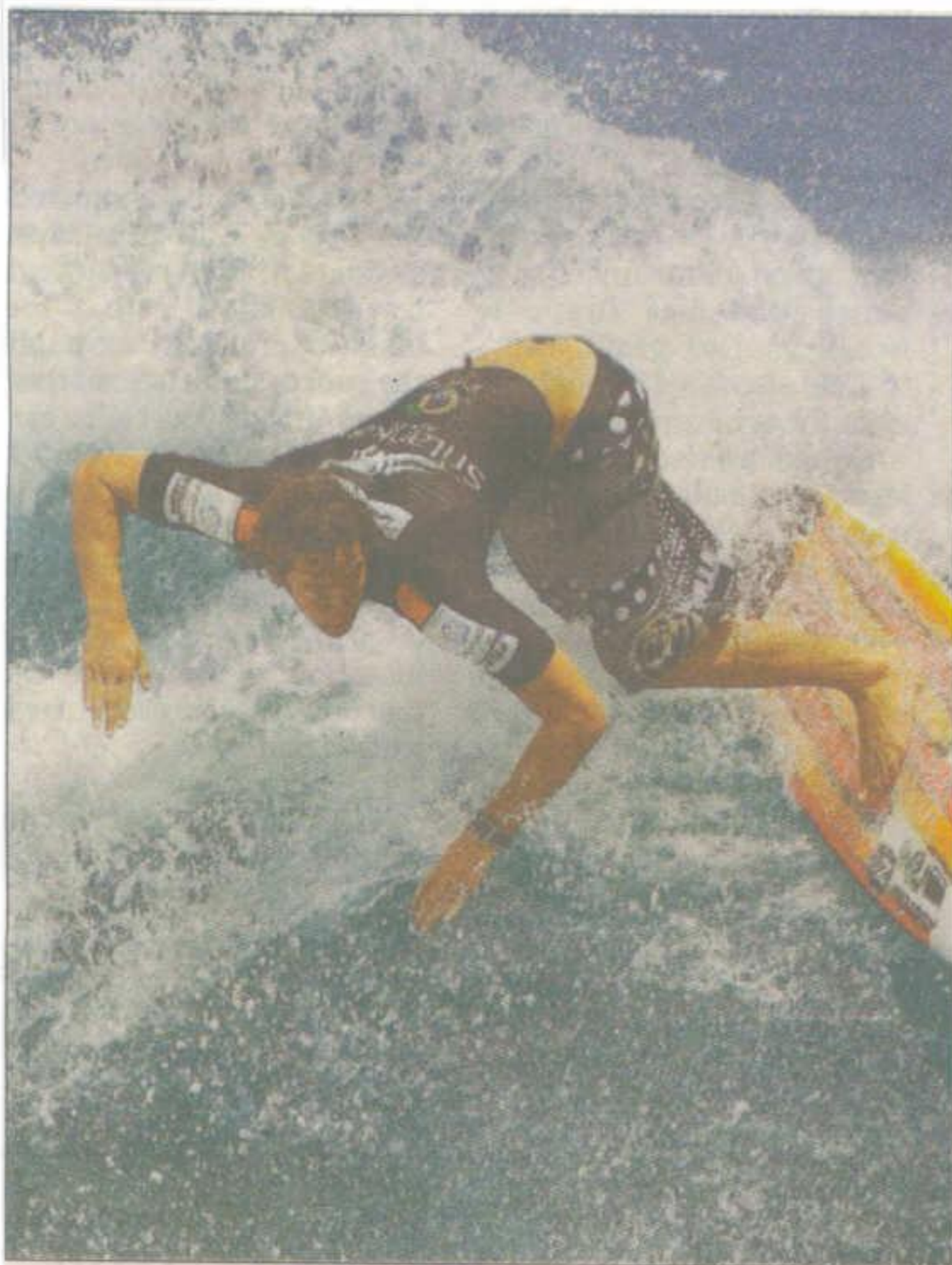
Circulation : ABC(Jan 2007-Mar 2007)
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302 mm X 134 mm
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3302003-National Pathology Group

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YOU don't have to take up surfing or beach soccer to get enough exposure to sunlight to keep your vitamin D levels up. Ten to 15 minutes in the sun twice a week without sunblock is sufficient

WE ARE all aware of the dangers of over-exposure to the sun. However, insufficient exposure to sunlight can be equally detrimental.

It can lead to a vitamin D deficiency and the countless problems associated with it, such as rickets, osteoporosis, fragile bones and muscle and bone pain.

Dr Stan Zail, a member of the National Pathology Group (NPG), says that people often underestimate the importance of vitamin D.

"Vitamin D is one of the most important vitamins, yet it is overlooked until one develops a bone disease. Only then do people begin to realise how important it really is. Vitamin D is an essential factor in calcium balance and optimal bone health," he said.

Osteoporosis is a huge concern among women today. Many women know they have to incorporate sufficient amounts of calcium into their diet, but most neglect to include vitamin D.

Vitamin D and calcium work hand-in-hand to increase bone density and prevent bone disease, as vitamin D assists the body in absorbing calcium. It is recommended that older women and men take a vitamin D supplement with their daily calcium supplement, as the combination reduces the risk of developing a bone disease.

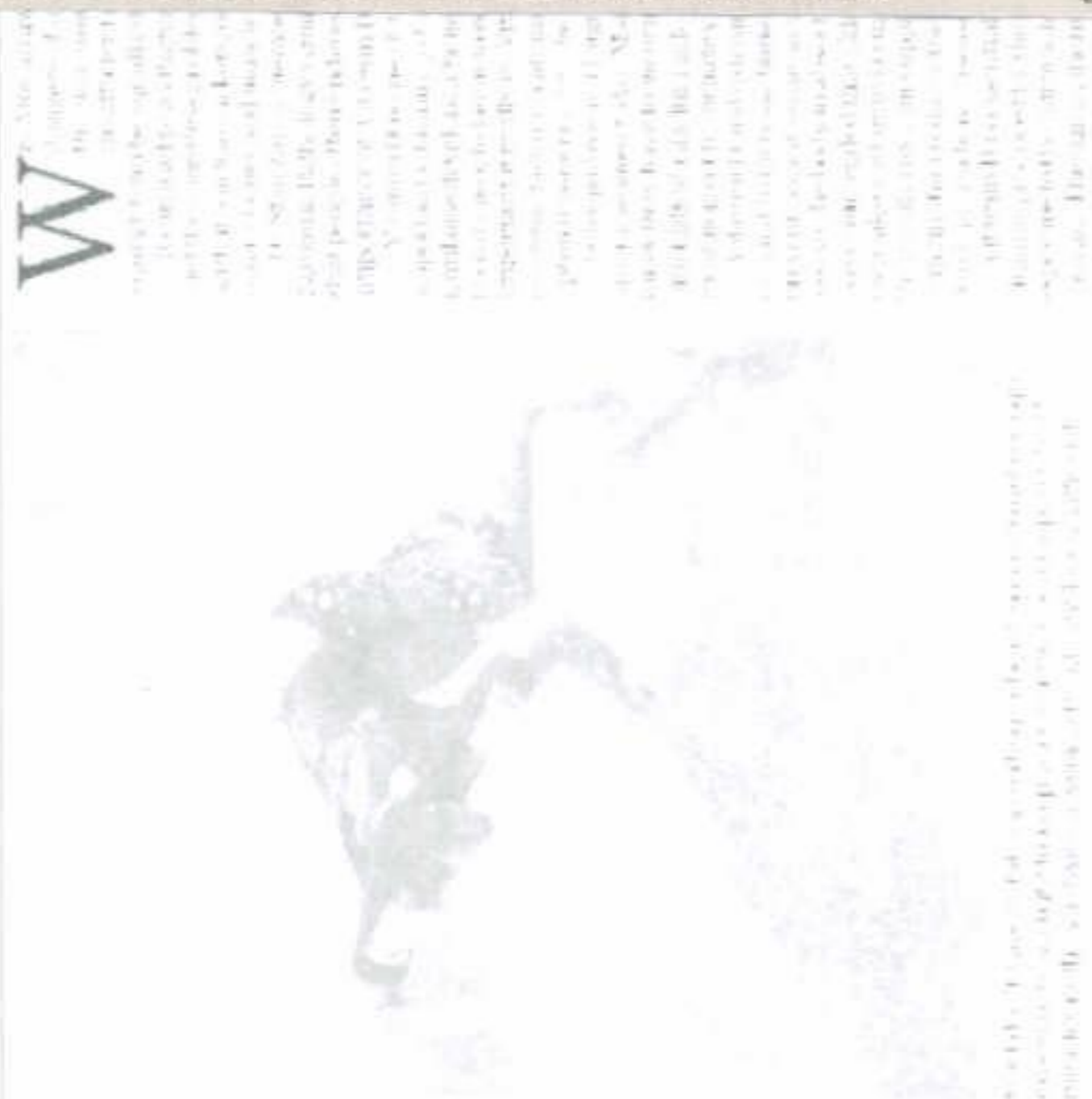
Vitamin D is essentially a fat-soluble vitamin produced by the body through exposure to the ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun. The sun is, therefore, crucial as

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it facilitates the production in the skin. Vitamin D is produced in many forms, each with a different level of activity. The most active form is calcitriol. Once vitamin D is absorbed by the skin, it needs to be converted into this active form with the aid of the liver and kidney. When vitamin D is in its active form it can be processed by the body.

The main biological function of vitamin D is to sustain normal levels of calcium and phosphorus, by absorbing calcium in the body. It works with other vitamins, such as vitamin K, and hormones to promote bone mineralisation. Without it, bones can become brittle and skeletal problems can occur.

While the easiest way to get vitamin D is from sunlight, it is also found in certain foods. In some countries, such as America, milk, bread and margarine products are fortified with vitamin D to help the average person get sufficient amounts in their diet. In South Africa, a milk supplement is available, but vitamin D can also be consumed in foods such as salmon, mackerel, tuna, cereals, margarines, eggs (egg yolk contains vitamin D) and liver.



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