

## Do I need vitamin D supplements?

If your health care professional has identified that you are at risk of vitamin D deficiency, you may want to consider buying your own supply of Vitamin D from health food shops or pharmacies.

Most adults need 400units (10mcg) of Vitamin D daily. Some people will need 800units (20mcg) daily. Your healthcare professional will tell which strength you need.

If your health care professional advises you to take a different dose of Vitamin D daily, ask your local pharmacist or health food store to advise you on a suitable product.

### **Are there any risks to taking vitamin D supplements?**

When taken at the dose recommended for you vitamin D is safe and usually has few side effects.

Never take more vitamin D than your health care professional recommends. Care is needed if you are taking some medications or have certain medical conditions. Ask your health care professional or pharmacist if you are unsure if vitamin D supplements are suitable.

## Summary

To improve your health and increase your vitamin D levels you can:

- Increase your exposure to sunlight to the recommended levels.
- Look at your diet and consider changes you can make to increase the food groups that are high in Vitamin D levels
- Buy a Vitamin D supplement. Your health care professional recommends the following dose:

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Ask your local pharmacist to advise you on a suitable product.

# Vitamin D



The role of vitamin D in your health and how to prevent vitamin D deficiency.

## What is vitamin D?

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin, which is also known as colecalciferol. Around 90% of the Vitamin D we need is made in the skin by exposure to sunlight. A small amount comes from our diet but most foods contain very little vitamin D naturally.

## Why do we need vitamin D?

Vitamin D is essential to our health and wellbeing, helping the body to absorb calcium and other nutrients from our diet. Vitamin D has a role in keeping bones strong and healthy, as well as keeping muscles, nerves and our immune system working well.

Together with calcium, vitamin D helps to protect older adults from osteoporosis, a condition affecting bone strength.

A lack of vitamin D can lead to bone deformities such as rickets in children, and bone pain caused by a condition called osteomalacia in adults.

## Who gets vitamin D deficiency?

Vitamin D deficiency means that there is not enough vitamin D in your body.

This can happen because:

- The body needs more vitamin D, for example whilst pregnant or breastfeeding.
- The body is unable to make enough vitamin D from sunlight on the skin. People who do not get enough sun exposure are more at risk, for example;
  - Older or housebound people.
  - People who remain covered up or who regularly wear sunscreen when outdoors.
  - People who have darker skin.
- Not enough vitamin D is taken in the diet, for example a vegetarian, vegan or fish free diet.
- Some medical conditions affect the way the body handles vitamin D, for example Crohn's disease, coeliac disease, liver or kidney disease.
- Certain drug treatments can affect vitamin D levels, for examples carbamazepine, phenytoin, primidone, and some anti-HIV medicines.

## How can I prevent vitamin D deficiency?

### Go out in the sun

During the summer months in the UK (April to October) fair skinned people can make enough vitamin D by being out in the sun, for 30 minutes twice a week (11am to 3pm) if their forearms, hands or lower legs are uncovered. Sunburn increases the risk of skin cancer so must be avoided: cover up or protect your skin with sunscreen before your skin starts to turn red or burn.

### Eat food that contains vitamin D

It is difficult to get enough vitamin D from food alone. However it is found in:

- Oily fish, such as salmon, mackerel, sardines and tuna
- Fish liver oils, such as cod liver oil
- Whole egg
- Beef liver
- Fortified foods such as margarine and some breakfast cereals – look out for the Recommended Daily Amount (RDA) of vitamin D on the packaging.

