

Why do we need vitamin D?





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To absorb calcium
To make healthy bones

What are the symptoms if we don't get enough vitamin D?

Bone pain
Muscle weakness
Rickets in children

Who might have low levels of vitamin D?

Everyone needs vitamin D. Lots of people in the UK do not have enough and need more. You are more at risk from not having enough if you:

- are South Asian, African, African-Caribbean, or Middle Eastern
- are over 65 years
- are pregnant or breastfeeding. Breastfeeding is recommended for all babies up to the age of 6 months
- cover up a lot of your body when outside (eg, wear the niqab or burqa)
- have a diet restricted to certain food groups (eg, vegan)
- are a baby, or growing child or teenager
- spend most of your time indoors (eg, in hospital, housebound, care home)
- have a medical condition with poor food absorption from your gut

Where do we get our vitamin D from?

Nearly all of vitamin D is made in our body from sunlight. Taking vitamin D supplements can be a very useful way for many people to get enough vitamin D, especially if you might have low levels of vitamin D. Only a very small amount of vitamin D comes from the foods we eat.

How can I get enough vitamin D from sunlight?

Enjoy the sun when it shines! In the UK, get 15 to 20 minutes sun on your skin (without sunscreen) on most days between 11.00am and 3.00pm in the summer between April and September. But always cover up or put on sunscreen before your skin becomes red or burns.

You don't need to sunbathe. Simply exposing your face and forearms to the sun is enough.

People with darker skin need more time in the sun to make vitamin D than people with fairer skin.

Get the sun for less time than it takes to go red or burn.



Where can I get vitamin D supplements from?

If you are pregnant or have a young child under five, you may be able to get these free or buy them at low cost from a health centre. Ask your midwife, health visitor or GP for more information about Healthy Start vitamins.

Vitamin D supplements can be bought from pharmacies, many supermarkets, or over the internet. A year's supply costs less than £15 (or £1.25 a month).

For most adults, a daily dose of between 10 and 25 micrograms (400 - 1,000 units) is enough - higher dose for people with darker skin or who do not get much sunshine. For babies and children, a daily dose of between 7 and 8.5 micrograms (280 - 340 units) is enough.



What food have vitamin D in them?

Foods that contain vitamin D include:

Oily fish, cereals with added vitamin D, eggs, margarine, evaporated milk.

Include these foods regularly as part of a healthy balanced diet to top up your vitamin D levels.

Remember.....

Enjoy being outside when the sun shines, but never burn

If you cannot get into the sunshine very much, take vitamin D supplements

If you don't go outside without covering up, take vitamin D supplements

Eat foods rich in vitamin D every day

If you are pregnant or have a young child, find out from your midwife or health visitor if you can get Healthy Start vitamins

All pregnant women are advised to take and are eligible for free Healthy Start vitamins which include Vitamin D

Give Healthy Start vitamins to your child every day if advised

Talk to your GP, midwife or health visitor if you need more information

You can also get more information from:

www.nhs.uk/conditions

www.healthystart.nhs.uk

