

Vitamin D Deficiency

Your recent blood test shows that your vitamin D levels are low.

Vitamin D is important for good health, growth and strong bones. A lack of vitamin D is very common.

What is vitamin D?

Vitamin D is a vitamin that is needed for good health. Most of the vitamin D we require is made in the skin by the action of sunlight. Foods that contain vitamin D include: Oily fish (such as sardines, pilchards, herring, trout, tuna, salmon and mackerel). Fortified foods (this means they have vitamin D added to them) such as some cereals.

Vitamin D and sunlight

It is estimated that around 20-30 minutes of sunlight on the face and forearms around the middle of the day 2-3 times a week is sufficient to make enough vitamin D in the summer months in the UK.

Remember too much exposure to the sun's rays can be damaging. Sunburn should be avoided (because it can increase your risk of skin cancer).

Who is at risk of Vitamin D deficiency?

People who get very little sunlight on their skin are at risk of vitamin D deficiency. In particular:

- People who stay inside a lot.
- People who cover up a lot of their body when outside. For example, wearing veils such as the niqab or burqa.
- People who have darker skin because their bodies are not able to make as much vitamin D from sunlight.
- Some medical conditions can affect the way the body handles vitamin D such as Crohn's disease, coeliac disease, and some types of liver and kidney disease.

What are the Symptoms of Vitamin D Deficiency?

General tiredness, vague aches and pains and a general sense of not being well are the common symptoms. In more severe deficiency (known as osteomalacia), there may be bone pain and also weakness.

How is Vitamin D Deficiency Treated?

Low vitamin D levels can be replaced with some high dose tablets taken for eight weeks. We have issued a prescription for this medication. Please read the instructions carefully as it will tell you exactly how many tablets to take and how long for. If you are registered for electronic prescribing the prescription will automatically go to your nominated pharmacy. If you are not registered for electronic prescribing the prescription will be waiting for you to collect from your usual Ridge surgery.

It may take up to three months for your symptoms to resolve.

After you have completed the course it is recommended that you buy some vitamin D supplements from your chemist to take daily to prevent your vitamin D levels falling low again.

More information can be found on the NHS Choices website at www.nhs.uk