



Vitamin D information for adults

This leaflet explains why vitamin D is important and how to get enough of it safely. It also explains the changes to the availability of vitamin D supplements on NHS prescription.

What is vitamin D?

Vitamin D is an essential vitamin that your body needs for healthy bones and muscles. It plays a role in your immune system and can also affect your mood and general energy levels.



What are good sources of vitamin D?

Sunlight

Vitamin D can be made naturally by the body when ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun come into contact with exposed skin when outdoors. Most people in the UK should be able to make enough vitamin D by exposing their face, hands, arms, or legs to the sun from late March to late September.

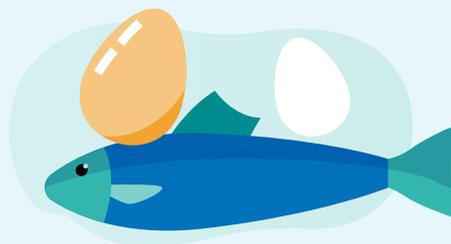
- People with white skin should do this for 10 to 15 minutes a day
- People with brown and black skin should do this for 25 to 40 minutes a day.

While getting out in the sun can help your vitamin D levels, too much sun exposure can lead to sunburn and an increased risk of skin cancer. If you are staying out in the sun for longer than the above time periods, or know that you have skin that burns very easily, you should use sunscreen or cover-up. You cannot overdose on vitamin D from sunlight, but using sun beds is not recommended as they could potentially cause harm.

Diet

Vitamin D can be found in foods which naturally contain it or which have it added.

- Oily fish (salmon, mackerel, trout, sardines, pilchards and herring) contain good amounts of vitamin D
- Egg yolks, red meat and mushrooms contain a small amount of vitamin D
- Fortified foods (cereals, plant milks, fat spreads and some breads) contain varying amounts of vitamin D.



It is difficult to get enough vitamin D just from your diet, so exposure to sunlight and the appropriate use of supplements are recommended alongside a balanced diet.

Supplements

See section on the next page: *Who needs vitamin D supplements?*

Who is at risk of not getting enough vitamin D?

Some people may be at greater risk of not getting enough vitamin D compared to others. These groups include:

- People with darker skin
- People aged 65 or over
- Pregnant or breastfeeding women
- Overweight or obese people
- People with certain medical conditions such as cystic fibrosis, inflammatory bowel disease or previous gastro-intestinal surgery
- People who spend a lot of time indoors, such as housebound people or those in long-term care settings like hospitals or care homes
- People who wear clothing which covers most of the skin when outdoors
- People who restrict certain foods, such as vegetarian and vegan diets
- People who take certain medications, such as antiepileptics, antivirals or steroids.

What are the symptoms of low vitamin D levels?

Usually, having low vitamin D levels causes no symptoms. However, you may feel tired or have minor aches. Severe deficiency can cause:

- Mood problems
- Muscle pain
- Bone pain and weakness that can reduce your movements
- Increased risk of bone fractures.

Who needs vitamin D supplements?

It is recommended that everyone in the UK takes a vitamin D supplement in the autumn and winter as there is less sunlight.

People who are at greater risk of vitamin D deficiency should think about taking a daily vitamin D supplement all year round.

How much vitamin D do I need from my supplement?

Adults who need to take a supplement should take 10 micrograms (400 IU) of vitamin D a day.

If your doctor has recommended that you take a different amount of vitamin D, you should follow their advice.

Do I need a vitamin D test?

Vitamin D is not tested routinely, so a vitamin D test will only be recommended by your doctor if:

- you are showing clear signs of deficiency
- you are taking a medication that puts you at risk of vitamin D deficiency
- you have a medical condition that may improve with vitamin D treatment, such as osteomalacia or osteoporosis.

Where can I get vitamin D supplements?

Vitamin D supplements can be bought from pharmacies, supermarkets and health shops. They come in various forms such as tablets, gummies and drops.

In line with national guidance, vitamin D will not be routinely offered on NHS prescription. If you are diagnosed with vitamin D deficiency, you may be prescribed a high-dose treatment for 6 to 12 weeks. After this, you should buy regular supplements for long-term use.

Are there any risks when taking vitamin D supplements?

Taking too much vitamin D over a long period of time can cause too much calcium to build up in the body. This can weaken the bones and damage certain organs. Therefore, it is advised to only take the recommended daily dose of 10 micrograms (400 IU) which is generally safe for most adults.

Speak to your pharmacist or doctor to discuss if vitamin D supplements are right for you.

