

Where can I get vitamin D supplements from?

You can buy low cost single vitamin D supplements or vitamin drops containing vitamin D (for children) at most pharmacies and supermarkets.

Women and children who qualify for the Healthy Start Scheme can get free supplements containing Vitamin D from Children's Centres. Please ask your midwife or health visitor for further information.

Vitamin D deficiency (very low levels of vitamin D)

If you have been identified by your healthcare professional as having a vitamin D deficiency, then you may be advised to take a higher strength dose of vitamin D. You should also follow advice around safe sun exposure and dietary advice.



Calcium

Calcium is also vital for strong teeth and bones. Most people should be able to get enough calcium through healthy eating. The daily recommended amount of calcium does vary with age, however 700 milligrams daily is enough to meet the daily requirements for nearly all of the adult population.

Examples of foods that are high in calcium are: milk, yoghurt, cheese and other dairy products, green leafy vegetables, soya beans, tofu and nuts.

Further information can be found on the following web page:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/healthy-bones/Pages/food-and-diet-for-strong-bones.aspx>

You can also calculate how much calcium you are getting from your diet by using a 'calcium calculator'. See the following webpage:

<http://www.cgem.ed.ac.uk/research/rheumatological/calcium-calculator>

If you need this leaflet in a different language, audio, large print or braille please contact us on sheccg.comms@nhs.net or 0114 305 1212.



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Vitamin D Information for patients



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Vitamin D

Vitamin D is important for bone health. It is needed to absorb calcium and other nutrients from our diet and helps to keep bones strong and healthy.

Vitamin D deficiency occurs when people do not get the recommended level of vitamin D over time. Adults with very low levels of vitamin D for a prolonged period of time can develop a condition called *Osteomalacia*. In this condition, calcium is lost from the bones. The bones become softened and more painful and broken bones (fractures) can occur without injury and the muscles weaken making it harder to walk. Children who have low levels of vitamin D can develop a similar condition called *rickets* which can also affect growth.

Nearly all of the vitamin D we obtain is made in our body via sunlight (around 90%) and a very small amount of vitamin D comes from our diet. It is important that sun exposure is safe and that we eat foods containing vitamin D as part of a healthy balanced diet.

Sunlight

The best way to increase vitamin D levels for most people is by spending time outdoors regularly over the summer months (late March to October). In the UK, the sun is strongest between 11am and 3pm.

- During this time most people can make sufficient vitamin D by going out for short periods and leaving only areas of skin that are often exposed uncovered (such as forearms, hands or lower legs). Longer periods may be needed for those with darker skin. People with very light skin, fair or red hair do not need much time in the sun to produce vitamin D.

- During this time, it is important to avoid sunburn. Prolonged exposure (for example leading to burning or dark tanning) is not a safe way to gain vitamin D. Skin should be protected when out in strong sunlight for more than a short period of time. The World Health Organisation recommends a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15.
- It is important to check the skin regularly for any changes (including changes to moles that occur over weeks or several months). If you detect any changes, it is important that you visit your GP.

Which foods have vitamin D in them?

Foods that contain small amounts of vitamin D include:

Oily fish (such as sardines, salmon and mackerel), liver, egg yolk, mushrooms, cheese, milk and butter (very small amounts) and fortified foods (including some margarines and breakfast cereals in the UK).

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

Should I take a vitamin D supplement?

The Department of Health recommends that:

Breastfed babies from birth to one year of age should be given a daily supplement containing 8.5 to 10 micrograms of vitamin D.

Babies fed infant formula should not be given a vitamin D supplement until they are receiving less than 500ml (about a pint) of infant formula a day, because infant formula is fortified with vitamin D.

Children aged 1 to 4 years old should be given a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D.

Advice for adults and children over five years old

Because vitamin D is found only in a small number of foods, it might be difficult to get enough from foods that naturally contain vitamin D and/or fortified foods alone.

Between late March/April to the end of September, most people aged five years and above will probably obtain sufficient vitamin D from sunlight when they are outdoors. So you might choose not to take a vitamin D supplement during these months, however Public Health England recommends that everyone should take a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D particularly during the autumn and winter months.

Some groups of people will not get enough vitamin D from sunlight because they have very little or no sunshine exposure. The Department of Health recommends that these people should take a daily supplement containing 10 micrograms of vitamin D throughout the year if they:

- are not often outdoors, such as those who are frail or housebound
- are in an institution such as a care home
- usually wear clothes that cover up most of their skin when outdoors.
- are from minority ethnic groups with dark skin, such as those of African, African-Caribbean or South Asian origin, might not get enough vitamin D from sunlight
- are pregnant or breastfeeding to ensure optimum bone health during this important time