

# Vitamin D Supplements

## Information to prevent low vitamin D levels

### Why is vitamin D important?

Vitamin D is a hormone made in our bodies when we are in the sun. It is also found in small amounts in foods. Vitamin D is important for bone and muscle health and our immune system.

### Vitamin D from Sunlight

From late March/early April to the end of September, most people can make enough vitamin D from being out in the sun. If you keep most of your skin covered when outdoors or if you do not go outdoors, you should take a vitamin D supplement

### In summer, how long should I be in the sun without sunscreen to make enough vitamin D?

Being in the sun with forearms, hands or lower legs uncovered, without sunscreen, between 11am and 3pm for the below times should provide enough sunlight

- Fair skinned people - 10-15 minutes each day
- Darker skinned people (e.g. those of African, African-Caribbean, Asian or Middle-Eastern descent) - 25-40 minutes each day

Do not spend longer in the sun without sunscreen to avoid the risks of sunburn and cancer. Take extra care on very hot or sunny days.

### Do I need to take vitamin D supplements?

#### Wintertime (October to March)

All adults and children older than one should take a daily supplement containing 400 units. This may be written as 400 international units (IU) or 10 micrograms of vitamin D.

This is because there is not enough sunlight in the UK during winter for our bodies to make vitamin D. Some foods contain vitamin D, but only in small amounts, so it is difficult for most people to get enough from food alone

#### Summertime (April to September)

Many people do not get enough vitamin D from sunlight, even during the summer. This might be because they do not go out in the sun much, cover most of their skin (due to religious, faith or cultural reasons), or their bodies do not make vitamin D very well.

**You should take a daily supplement containing 400units (10 micrograms) of vitamin D all year round, if one or more of the following applies to you:**

- You wear clothes that cover up most of your skin when outdoors
- You do not go outside the house often, or live in a care home

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- You have darker skin, for example of African, African-Caribbean, Asian or Middle Eastern descent
- You are over the age of 65
- You are pregnant or breastfeeding

### **Babies and Children under 5**

Babies and children under five, who are drinking less than 500ml of infant formula a day should also take 340-400units (8.5-10 micrograms) of vitamin D per day. They may be able to get free supplements on the [Healthy Start Scheme](#).

### **Is there vitamin D in my current medications?**

Vitamin D is often contained in **calcium supplements** because our bodies need vitamin D to absorb calcium. **Multivitamin and mineral** supplements, and some **Oral Nutritional Supplement drinks** also contain vitamin D, so if you take any of these, you may already be getting enough vitamin D. If you are unsure, check with your pharmacist.

### **How much vitamin D should I take?**

Vitamin D supplements containing 400units (10 micrograms) are available to purchase from pharmacies, supermarkets and online.

### **Is it possible to take too much vitamin D?**

Supplements containing higher doses of vitamin D, are available and vitamin D can be found in multivitamin and mineral and other supplements. Taking more than 4000units (100 micrograms) of vitamin D a day for a long time could be harmful. Some people have medical conditions that mean they should not take as much vitamin D. If in doubt about which vitamin D product to buy, talk to a pharmacist or your doctor.

You cannot overdose on vitamin D from sunlight. Remember to cover up or protect your skin if you are in the sun for a long time to reduce the risk of skin damage and skin cancer.

### **Will taking vitamin D supplements help prevent Covid-19?**

There is no evidence to support taking vitamin D to prevent or treat COVID-19.

### **Can I get free or prescribed vitamin D?**

Vitamin D is not routinely prescribed to prevent people becoming deficient as supplements are widely available to buy.

If you are pregnant or breastfeeding, you may be able to get [Healthy Start Vitamins](#)

Vitamin D can be prescribed for some people who are taking certain medications or have had a blood test showing their levels of Vitamin D are low. Unless you have symptoms of vitamin D deficiency you do not need to be tested. Symptoms include bone pains (often in the legs), weak muscles and bowing of the leg bones in children – if you have some or all these symptoms contact your GP to discuss whether you need a blood test.

### **Where can I find out more?**

[BDA Food Factsheet: Vitamin D](http://www.bda.uk.com/vitamin-d): [www.bda.uk.com/vitamin-d](http://www.bda.uk.com/vitamin-d)

[NHS information on Vitamin D](http://www.nhs.co.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitmain-d): [www.nhs.co.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitmain-d](http://www.nhs.co.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitmain-d)