

Vitamin D patient information

Why do we need vitamin D?

Vitamin D is needed to keep bones, teeth and muscles healthy. If you have low levels of vitamin D you may feel tired or have aches and pains, but some people don't have any symptoms at all. If vitamin D levels fall very low (known as vitamin D deficiency) bones can become soft and weak, which can lead to deformities, especially in children and young people.



How can I increase my vitamin D levels?

Our main source of vitamin D is the action of sunlight on our skin. Small amounts of sunlight, as you might get through daily activities (e.g. 15 minutes between 11am and 3pm from April to September three times a week), may help to boost your vitamin D levels. Just exposing your face and forearms to the sun should be enough. People with dark skin, e.g. of African, African-Caribbean or south Asian origin, will need to spend longer in the sun to produce the same amount of vitamin D as someone with lighter skin.

Be careful not to burn in the sun, so take care to cover up, or protect your skin with sunscreen before your skin starts to turn red or burn.

Although sunlight is the main source of vitamin D, eating vitamin D rich food is also beneficial as part of a healthy balanced diet. Food sources which are rich in vitamin D include:

- Egg yolks
- Liver
- Red meat
- Oily fish – such as salmon, sardines, herring and mackerel
- Foods fortified with vitamins – such as margarine, some breakfast cereals and vegetarian friendly foods such as soy yogurt.



Who should take a vitamin D supplement?

Public Health England recommends that **everyone** should take a daily supplement of vitamin D during the *autumn and winter months*. **Most people get enough vitamin D from sunlight and food in spring and summer so don't need a supplement during these months.**

Some people can't get enough vitamin D from sunlight. You should take a daily supplement **all year-round** if:

- you are not often outdoors, for example if you are frail or housebound
- you live in a residential or care home*
- you usually wear clothes that cover up most of your skin when outdoors
- you have dark skin, such as those of African, African-Caribbean or South Asian origin
- you are pregnant or breastfeeding

[Continued overleaf...](#)

What dose of vitamin D should I take?

Adults and children over 5 years old:

Adults and children over 5 need 400 units (10 micrograms) a day. This includes pregnant and breastfeeding women.

If you have been identified by your healthcare professional as having a vitamin D deficiency, you may be advised to take a higher dose of vitamin D.

Babies and children up to 5 years old:

The Department of Health recommends that:

- breastfed babies from birth to 1 year should be given a daily supplement containing 340 units (8.5 micrograms) to 400 units (10 micrograms) of vitamin D
- formula-fed babies having less than 500ml (about a pint) of infant formula a day should be given a vitamin D supplement
- children aged 1 to 4 years old should be given a daily supplement containing 400 units (10 micrograms) of vitamin D

Where can I get vitamin D supplements?

Low cost vitamin D supplements can be purchased from pharmacies, most supermarkets and health food shops. Vitamin D is also known as colecalciferol.

When you are choosing an over the counter vitamin D supplement look for vitamin D3 (colecalciferol) as this form of Vitamin D is best absorbed by your body.



GP practices in Sussex no longer routinely prescribe vitamin D supplements on the NHS. Patients currently receiving vitamin D on a repeat prescription **for routine replacement** will be reviewed and most prescriptions stopped. Patients taking calcium and vitamin D for a medical condition, such as osteoporosis, will continue to get prescriptions on the NHS.

If your vitamin D levels are very low, you may be prescribed a treatment course of vitamin D. Once the treatment course is completed, you will be advised to buy vitamin D supplements and take them long-term to prevent your vitamin D levels from falling again.

Daily supplements are available in a variety of strengths and products (these strengths may be shown as micrograms or units on the label), ask your community pharmacist for advice if you are unsure which vitamin D product would be best for you.



Women and children

Women and children may qualify for the Healthy Start scheme and can get free supplements containing the recommended amounts of vitamin D. More information can be obtained from <https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/> or by asking your midwife / health visitor.

Further information

Further information on vitamin D from the NHS is available on the NHS website using the following links:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/>

*[https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vitamin-d-for-vulnerable-groups/vitamin-d-and-care-homes-guidance-\(winter-2021\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vitamin-d-for-vulnerable-groups/vitamin-d-and-care-homes-guidance-(winter-2021))

If you would like this information in an alternative format, please contact the NHS Sussex Public Involvement team. Phone: 01903 708411