

Vitamin D for adults



Vitamin D is an essential nutrient, also known as the sunshine vitamin. It works with calcium and phosphorous in our bodies to keep bones, muscles and teeth healthy. If we do not have enough vitamin D we may develop softer bones, poorer muscle strength and be more likely to fall as we get older.

How do we get vitamin D?

Most of our vitamin D comes from the action of the sun's ultraviolet (UV), rays on our skin when we spend time outside in the sunlight.

In the UK, the sun is only strong enough for us to make vitamin D from sunlight between April and September.

Most people can make enough vitamin D by being in the sunlight for short periods, ideally between 11am and 3pm, with exposed skin such as the forearms, lower legs or face.

It's important not to get sunburnt so we need to balance getting enough vitamin D and staying safe in the sun.

Make sure you apply sunscreen or cover up before your skin starts to turn red and be very careful not to burn.

How much vitamin D do I need?

Everyone over the age of 1 year should have 10 micrograms (mcg or μg) or 400 international units (IU) of vitamin D per day (Public Health England, 2016). This includes pregnant and breastfeeding women and people at risk of low vitamin D.

Who's at risk of low vitamin D?

- People over 65 years of age.
- Pregnant and breastfeeding women.
- People who spend very little time with their skin exposed to sunlight, for example those who cover their skin for cultural reasons, those who are housebound or indoors for long periods.
- People who have darker skin, for example people of African, African-Caribbean and South Asian family origin.

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How can I get vitamin D from food?

It's difficult to get all the vitamin D you need from food but you can help by eating the following foods:

- oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, trout, sardines, pilchards and herring are good sources of vitamin D and there is a smaller amount in canned tuna
- egg yolks, meat and milk contain a small amount of vitamin D
- margarine and some breakfast cereals have vitamin D added

Should I take a vitamin D supplement?

Most people will get enough vitamin D from April to the end of September from sunlight on the skin and a healthy, balanced diet. Public Health England recommends that everyone over the age of 1 year considers taking a vitamin D supplement of 10 micrograms (mcg or μg) or 400 IU, a day during the autumn and winter months (October to March).

People who are in the high risk groups should consider taking a supplement of 10 micrograms (mcg or μg) or 400 IU, of vitamin D all year round.

Vitamin D supplements are widely available to purchase from pharmacies, health food stores, online or in some supermarkets (see the table at the end of this leaflet).

Healthy Start vitamins

Some pregnant women, women with a child under 12 months and children from 6 months to 4 years are entitled to free Healthy Start vitamins containing vitamin D. Please ask your health visitor about this or check online at www.healthystart.nhs.uk.

Can I have too much vitamin D?

Taking a supplement, eating vitamin D rich foods and spending time outside in sunlight isn't a problem. Don't take more than one supplement containing vitamin D (including cod liver oil) as you may be getting too much vitamin D. If you start taking a supplement and are already taking a different vitamin and mineral supplement then please discuss this with your GP, pharmacist or dietitian.



Only take a higher strength vitamin D if you have been advised to do so by your doctor. Taking more than 10 – 12.5 micrograms (mcg or μg) or 400IU – 500IU of vitamin D per day is not necessary and high doses could be harmful in the long-term.



Where can I buy vitamin D supplements?

Please use the information in the table below to help you select a suitable vitamin D supplement. This is just a guide. Other brands are available from other stores. Vitamin D (D3) supplements may also be called Colecalciferol. Some brands contain 12.5 micrograms (mcg or μg) or 500IU, which is also fine to take on a daily basis.

Name of product	Source	Strength and presentation	Approx price	Approx cost per day (1 tablet)
Boots Vitamin D 10 μg	Boots	10 μg /400IU 90 tablets	£2.30	£0.03
Holland and Barrett Vitamin D3 10 μg	Holland and Barrett	10 μg /400IU 100 tablets	£3.59	£0.04
Day Lewis Vitamin D 400IU	Day Lewis Pharmacy	10 μg /400IU 90 tablets	£4.75	£0.05
Wilko Wellbeing Vitamin D 12.5 μg	Wilko	12.5 μg /500IU 90 tablets	£1.50	£0.02
Superdrug Vitamin D 12.5 μg	Superdrug	12.5 μg /500IU 90 tablets	£2.49	£0.03

Prices correct as of November 2020

Useful websites for more information

- www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-minerals/pages/vitamin-D
- www.healthystart.nhs.uk/healthy-start-vouchers
- www.gov.uk/government/news/phe-publishes-new-advice-on-vitamin-d



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