

Vitamin D Supplements

Information for patients

Why is Vitamin D important?

Vitamin D is a hormone made in our bodies in the presence of sunlight. It is also found in small amounts in foods. Vitamin D is essential for bone and muscle health, and supports a healthy immune system.

Do I need to take Vitamin D supplements?

During winter, and ideally all year round, **children from one year old and adults in the UK should take a daily supplement containing at least 400 international units (IU) of Vitamin D.** This is equivalent to 10 micrograms (µg).

This is because there is not enough sunlight in the UK during winter (October to March) for the body to make its own Vitamin D. Whilst Vitamin D is in some foods, it is difficult for most people to get enough from food alone.

Many people do not get enough vitamin D from sunlight, even during the summer, because they have little or no sunshine exposure, or a reduced ability to make Vitamin D.

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

- You are shielding due to Covid-19
- You wear clothes that cover up most of the skin when outdoors
- You are housebound, work indoors during the day, or are a night shift worker
- 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

Infants and children under four, who are taking less than 500ml of infant formula a day should also take 340-400 IU (8.5-10 micrograms) of Vitamin D per day, and may be eligible for free supplements on the Healthy Start Scheme.

Is it possible to take too much Vitamin D?

Some supplements contain a higher dose, such as 800 IU (20 micrograms). These are also safe and effective. However, taking more than 4000 IU (100 micrograms) of Vitamin D a day **for a long time** could be harmful. If you have purchased supplements containing a higher dose than this, take them less frequently so your overall intake is lower. Children under 10 should not take more than 2000 IU (50 micrograms) per day.

Will taking Vitamin D supplements help prevent Covid-19?

The direct link between Vitamin D and Covid-19 prevention and treatment is still being established.

Is there Vitamin D in my existing medications?

Vitamin D is often contained in **calcium** supplements, because the body needs Vitamin D to absorb calcium. 'One a Day' **Multivitamin and Mineral** supplements, and some **Oral Nutritional Supplements** also contain Vitamin D at the recommended amount, so if you take any of these, you may already be getting enough Vitamin D. If you are unsure, check with your pharmacist.

Can I get free or prescribed vitamin D?

Vitamin D is not routinely prescribed. This is because supplements are widely available to buy.

Those who have been advised to shield due to Covid-19 may be at risk of Vitamin D deficiency if they have spent little time outdoors. Therefore, in January 2021, The UK Government will deliver four months' supply of Vitamin D supplements to those who are **extremely clinically vulnerable** to Covid-19.

If you are eligible, you will have received a letter inviting you to opt-in to receive the supplements. If you think you are eligible and haven't received a letter, you can opt in by visiting The NHS website - NHS (www.nhs.uk) and typing 'get Vitamin D' into the search bar.

Vitamin D can be prescribed in higher doses for people who have persistent symptoms suggesting Vitamin D deficiency, which is confirmed by a blood test. Unless you have symptoms of Vitamin D deficiency you do not need to be tested, as meeting the recommended intake every day is usually enough to maintain adequate Vitamin D levels.

Which supplement should I buy?

Supplements containing 400 IU (10 micrograms) are available to purchase from pharmacies, supermarkets and online. Vitamin D is available in two forms, vitamin D₃ (colecalciferol), and vitamin D₂ (ergocalciferol). Vitamin D₃ is usually from animal sources, and vitamin D₂ is from plant sources.

My relative lives in a care home, how do they get Vitamin D supplements?

In January 2021, the UK Government will deliver four months' supply of Vitamin D supplements to all care home residents. Residents do not need to opt in and these will be supplied automatically.

Where can I find out more?

BDA Food Factsheet: Vitamin D:

www.bda.uk.com/resource/covid-19-rapid-guideline-vitamin-d.html

NHS information on Vitamin D:

www.nhs.uk/conditions/vitamins-and-minerals/vitamin-d/

Vitamin D supplementation in winter:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vitamin-d-supplementation-during-winter-phe-and-nice-statement/statement-from-phe-and-nice-on-vitamin-d-supplementation-during-winter>