

Self-care information on...

Vitamin D



Why do we need vitamin D?

Vitamin D is important for good health, growth and strong bones. A mild lack of vitamin D may not cause any symptoms. Very low levels of vitamin D can cause more serious problems such as bone pain and tenderness as a result of a condition called osteomalacia.

Sources of vitamin D

Your body makes vitamin D from the action of sunlight on your skin. Exposing your skin, without sunscreen, for two to three **short** periods per week (10 to 15 minutes) of sunlight between 11am to 3pm from April to October should be sufficient to improve vitamin D levels.

Never allow your skin to start going red or burn in the sun. Take care to cover up or protect your skin with sunscreen before you turn red or get burnt. You do not need a tan to make vitamin D.

Almost all of our vitamin D comes from sunlight. However, vitamin D is also found in a small number of foods, for example: oily fish such as salmon, sardines and mackerel; eggs; milk; margarine and fortified breakfast cereals.

Do I need a vitamin D supplement?

Most people should be able to get all the vitamin D they need by eating a healthy balanced diet and by getting some summer sun.

However some groups of people are more at risk of not getting enough vitamin D, they are:

- Pregnant and breastfeeding women
- Babies and children younger than five years old
- People aged 65 years and over
- People who are not exposed to much sun, such as people who cover up their skin when outdoors or those who are housebound or confined indoors for long periods
- People who have darker skin such as people of African, African-Caribbean and South Asian origin.

Current recommendations are that people aged **65 years and over**, people who are **not exposed to much sun** and all **pregnant and breastfeeding** women should take a daily supplement containing 400IU (10 mcg) of vitamin D. Even if you do not fit into one of these groups, your GP may advise you to take a vitamin D supplement if they feel you could become low on vitamin D.

Children under 5 years are also recommended to take a daily supplement of vitamin D. Your health visitor will be able to advise you on whether your child needs vitamin D drops and which products are most suitable for them.

Vitamin D supplements can be bought from many high street shops and supermarkets. Some examples of products that meet the adult requirements and are available to purchase can be found on the next page.

In some cases, your GP may decide to do a blood test to check your vitamin D levels. If this test shows your vitamin D levels are a bit low, your GP may recommend that you purchase vitamin D supplements. Your GP should tell you which dose of vitamin D you should take.

If your blood test shows that your vitamin D levels are very low, your GP may prescribe you a short course of high dose vitamin D.

Examples of vitamin D products available for adults to purchase

Always check the amount of vitamin D contained in the supplement matches your requirements. If you are unsure ask your pharmacist or GP for advice.

| Product | Approximate price | Source | Suitability |
|--|-------------------|--|---|
| Boots Pharmaceuticals Vitamin D 400IU (10mcg) tablets | 90 tablets £2.19 | Available in store and online from Boots www.boots.com | <i>Suitable for vegetarians but not vegans</i> |
| Tesco Vitamin D 500IU (12.5mcg) tablets | 90 tablets £1.99 | Available in store and online from Tesco www.tesco.com | <i>Suitable for vegetarians but not vegans</i> |
| Deva Vegan Vitamin D 800IU (20mcg) tablets | 90 tablets £5.99 | Available for purchase online | <i>Suitable for vegetarians and vegans</i> |
| Holland and Barrett Sunvite D3 Fast acting liquid 1000IU (25mcg)/ 10drops | 59mls £8.99 | Available in store and online from Holland and Barrett www.hollandand-barrett.com | <i>Suitable for vegetarians but not vegans</i> |
| Boots Pharmaceuticals Vitamin D3 1000IU (25mcg) tablets | 90 tablets £5.10 | Available in store and online from Boots www.boots.com | <i>Suitable for vegetarians but not vegans</i> |

Products containing calcium AND vitamin D that are more suitable for those aged over 65 years:

| Product | Approximate price | Source | Suitability |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| Calcichew D3 Forte Vitamin D 400IU (10mcg) and calcium carbonate 1.25g tablets | 60 chewable tablets £4.24 | Available to buy from pharmacies | <i>Suitable for vegetarians but not vegans</i> |
| Calceos Vitamin D 400IU (10mcg) and calcium carbonate 1.25g tablets | 60 chewable tablets £3.58 | Available to buy from pharmacies | <i>Not suitable for people with peanut/soya allergy or vegetarians and vegans</i> |

Examples of vitamin D products for pregnant women

| Product | Approximate price | Source | Suitability |
|--|--|--|--|
| Healthy Start Vitamins for pregnant women Contains vitamin D 400IU (10mcg) (Also contains vitamin C and folic acid) | 56 tablets free of charge where eligible; £0.91 for purchase | Available from midwives, health visitors and childrens centres and also some pharmacies. For more information visit www.healthystart.nhs.uk | <i>Suitable for vegetarians but not vegans</i> |
| Pregnacare multivitamins and minerals Contain vitamin D 400IU (10mcg) (Also contains multiple other constituents) | 30 tablets Prices from approx. £4 | Various supermarkets, chemists and online | |
| Sanatogen Mum to Be multivitamins and minerals Contain vitamin D 400IU (10mcg) (Also contains multiple other constituents) | 60 tablets Prices vary - from £13 | Various supermarkets, chemists and online | |

If you need any further information:

- Ask your pharmacist
- NHS choices: www.nhs.uk
- Patient UK www.patient.co.uk

