

What is Vitamin D and why do we need it?

Vitamin D forms in the skin when it is exposed to sunlight. We need Vitamin D to maintain good health and to keep bones and muscles strong and healthy.

Vitamin D can be obtained from the following sources:

1. Sunlight

From sunlight the body can make more than 90% of the Vitamin D we need.

How long should we spend in the sun?

Most people can make enough Vitamin D from being out in the sun daily for short periods with their forearms, hands or lower legs uncovered and without sunscreen from late March or early April to the end of September, especially from 11am to 3pm.

It's not known exactly how much time is needed in the sun to make enough Vitamin D to meet the body's requirements as a number of factors can affect how Vitamin D is made, such as your skin colour or how much skin you have exposed.

You should 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.

People with dark skin, such as those 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.

How long it takes for your skin to go red or burn varies from person to person. Cancer Research UK has [tips to help you protect your skin in the sun](#).

2. Food Sources

Small amounts of Vitamin D are also obtained from oily fish, egg yolks, mushrooms, fortified breakfast cereals, milk and margarine. Try to include these foods regularly as part of a healthy balanced diet to top up your Vitamin D levels.

Do I need to take a Vitamin D supplement?

It is recommended that the following groups take a Vitamin D supplement to prevent symptoms of low Vitamin D. This is referred to as 'primary prevention of vitamin D deficiency':

- ◇ People who remain indoors, such as those who are frail or housebound
- ◇ Live in a care or residential home
- ◇ Cover up their skin when they are outdoors
- ◇ From African, African-Caribbean or South Asian origin with dark skin.
- ◇ Are pregnant or breastfeeding, to ensure optimum bone health during this important time.
- ◇ Babies/infants receiving less than 500ml of milk formula/day.

Changes if you currently get prescriptions for vitamin D

GP practices in Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) will no longer routinely prescribe Vitamin D supplements for prevention of Vitamin D deficiency. Patients currently receiving vitamin D supplements on prescription for low Vitamin D will be reviewed with a view to stopping this routine NHS provision in line with NICE guidance national recommendations.

When will prescriptions for Vitamin D stop?

Your GP may prescribe a high dose vitamin D if very low Vitamin D has been confirmed by a blood test. A blood test will only be offered if you have either:

- ◇ Osteoporosis and a risk factor for low Vitamin D, or
- ◇ Suspected Osteomalacia and risk factors for low Vitamin D

Osteomalacia

Osteomalacia means soft bones. When normal bone is formed, these fibres are coated with mineral. This process is called mineralisation. Osteomalacia happens if mineralisation does not take place properly.

After your Vitamin D levels have been corrected you will be advised to purchase ongoing low dose Vitamin D supplement, to maintain your Vitamin D levels at a normal level.

Vitamin D for primary prevention deficiency will no longer be prescribed by your GP.

Where can I buy over the counter Vitamin D?

Vitamin D can be bought over the counter, or online, from pharmacies, health shops and supermarkets, in the form of 'colecalciferol' (preferred) or 'ergocalciferol'. Examples of brand names include: - SunvitD3, ProD3. The doses recommended in this leaflet are daily safe doses.