

Vitamin D

Everyone **could benefit** from taking vitamin D supplements.

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, though some people don't have any symptoms at all. If vitamin D levels fall very low (known as vitamin D deficiency) bones can become softer and weakened, which can lead to other problems.



How can I increase my vitamin D levels?

Go outside: Our main source of vitamin D is from the action of sunlight on our skin. Small amounts of light all through the year, even on cloudy days, during your daily activities (e.g., for 30 minutes each day), may help to boost your vitamin D levels and just exposing your face and forearms to the daylight can be enough.

But you must be careful not to burn in the sun, especially in the summertime; take care to protect your skin with sunscreen so that it doesn't start 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.

Eat foods that contain higher amounts of vitamin D as part of a healthy balanced diet, such as:

- Oily fish –for example mackerel, salmon, sardines, and herring
- Liver
- Egg yolks
- Fortified foods – such as most fat spreads, soy yoghurts, soy milk, almond milk, some orange juices, and some breakfast cereals
- Tinned tuna
- Mushrooms
- Red meat
- Cheese



Who should take a vitamin D supplement?

Public Health England recommends that **everyone** should take a daily supplement of vitamin D, particularly 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 though and should take a daily supplement **all year round**. This applies to you if:

- you are not often outdoors, for example if you are frail or housebound.
- you live in a care home.
- you usually wear clothes that cover up most of your skin when outdoors.
- you have dark skin, for example if you are of African, African-Caribbean, or south Asian origin.
- you are pregnant or breastfeeding, to ensure healthy bones for baby and you.

Where can I get vitamin D supplements from?

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

GP practices in Nottinghamshire no longer routinely prescribe vitamin D supplements for regular treatment. Patients currently receiving **ongoing** vitamin D supplements on a prescription will be reviewed, with a view to stopping this provision on the NHS if appropriate.



If your vitamin D levels are very low though, 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 yourself and take them long-term to prevent your vitamin D levels from falling again.

What dose of vitamin D should I take?

Adults and children over 5 years old:

Adults and children over 5 years old need 400 units (10 micrograms) a day. This includes pregnant and breastfeeding women and people at risk of vitamin D deficiency.

Doses of up to 1000 units (25 micrograms) daily are acceptable for adults as a supplement. Supplements containing 1000 units (25 micrograms) are considerably cheaper to buy than those containing 400 units (10 micrograms) or 800 units (20 micrograms).

If you have been identified by your healthcare professional as having a vitamin D deficiency, then 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 of age should be given a daily supplement containing 340 units (8.5 micrograms) to 400 units (10 micrograms) of vitamin D.
- formula-fed babies shouldn't be given a vitamin D supplement until they're having less than 500ml (about a pint) of infant formula a day, as infant formula is fortified with vitamin D.
- children aged 1 to 4 years old should be given a daily supplement containing 400 units (10 micrograms) of vitamin D.

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 link:

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