

Vitamin D

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is important to keep your bones strong and healthy. It also helps your body fight off germs, and your nerves carry messages to and from your brain.

A 2010 study by the Pediatric Academic Societies suggests that vitamin D may help prevent preterm labor, preterm birth, and infections in pregnant women.

As you get older, your skin is not as good at making vitamin D as it did when you were younger. The color of your skin also affects how much vitamin D your skin makes. The lighter your skin, the more vitamin D you make.

Sources of Vitamin D

Vitamin D comes from 3 sources: food, sun exposure and supplements (pills).

■ Food

Just a few foods naturally have vitamin D. The best sources are fatty fish such as salmon and tuna. Nearly all milk has added vitamin D. Some brands of cereal, orange juice and margarine also have added vitamin D.

■ Sun exposure

Your body makes vitamin D when your skin is exposed to direct sunlight. This is why vitamin D is called the “sunshine vitamin.”

Cloud cover, shade and using sunscreen or clothing to protect your skin from the sun will cut down the amount of vitamin D your skin makes.

You can spend some time in the sun each day, but be sure to wear an SPF 15 or higher sunscreen if you plan to be in the sun for more than 15 minutes. This will lower your risk for skin cancer.

Sunlight filtered through a window will not help your body make vitamin D.

In the northern half of the United States between late fall and early spring, energy from the sun is not enough for people to make vitamin D.

■ Supplements

The easiest way to get vitamin D is through supplements (vitamins).

How Much Vitamin D You Need

Adults need the following amounts of vitamin D each day:

- ages 18 to 70: 600 IU
- ages 71 and older: 800 IU
- women who are pregnant or breastfeeding: 600 IU.

The safe upper limits of vitamin D a day for adults and pregnant or breastfeeding women is 4,000 IU a day.

(over)

Not Getting Enough Vitamin D

A lack of vitamin D puts you at risk for weak bones, bone pain and muscle weakness.

Research is ongoing to study links between low levels of vitamin D and type 1 diabetes, heart disease, depression, certain cancers, and high blood pressure during pregnancy, among others.

Vitamin D Blood Test

Talk with your health care provider to find out if you need a blood test to check your vitamin D level.

If your blood test shows that your vitamin D level is too low, your health care provider may want you to take:

- ❑ **an over-the-counter supplement:** there are different strengths. Your health care provider will tell you what strength is right for you.
- ❑ **a prescription supplement:** the prescription strength is much stronger than the over-the-counter strengths. Follow your health care provider's instructions.

Your health care provider may want you to return to the clinic for a follow-up blood test.

Getting Too Much Vitamin D

Too much vitamin D can be harmful. Signs of too much vitamin D includes:

- upset stomach
- vomiting
- poor appetite
- constipation
- weakness
- weight loss.

If you have any of the above symptoms, please talk with your health care provider.

Vitamin D and Other Medicines

Vitamin D may interact with other medicines you are taking. This means that some medicines may not work as well or work too much.

Tell your health care provider all of the medicines you take. Include over-the-counter, prescription, herbals, natural products and supplements you currently take.

**Information adapted from the
National Institutes of Health Office of
Dietary Supplements.**