

Information about Vitamin D

1. What does vitamin D do?

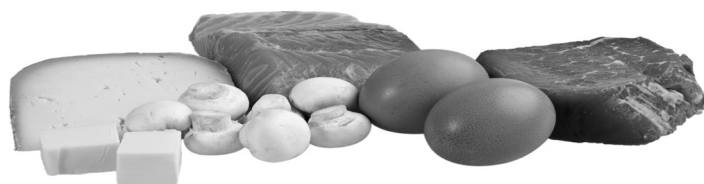
Vitamin D has several important roles. For example, it helps control the amount of calcium and phosphate in your body, which you need to keep your bones and teeth healthy.

Having too little vitamin D (a deficiency) can damage the way your body absorbs calcium and phosphorus. In children, this can lead to rickets, a condition that can cause bone deformities, such as bowed legs. In adults, vitamin D deficiency can cause osteomalacia (weak bones).

2. Where do I get vitamin D?

You get most of your vitamin D from sunlight on your skin. Your skin reacts to sunlight and vitamin D forms under the skin. Vitamin D is also found in a small number of foods, including:

- oily fish
- eggs
- fortified foods that have had vitamin D added to them, such as margarine, breakfast cereals and powdered milk



3. Who is at risk of vitamin D deficiency?

Most people can get all the vitamin D they need by eating a healthy, balanced diet and getting a little sun. However, the Department of Health recommends a daily 10 microgram vitamin D supplement for the following people:

- all pregnant and breastfeeding women
- all people aged 65 and over
- people who aren't exposed to much sun, for example, those who cover their skin for cultural reasons or who are housebound
- people with darker skin

All children aged six months to five years should also be given a vitamin D supplement. Babies under six months old who are only breastfed might benefit from vitamin D – ask your midwife or health visitor for advice.

4. Where do I get vitamin D supplements?

You can buy vitamin D in pharmacies, supermarkets or health food shops. If you take vitamin D supplements, do not take too much (e.g. not more than instructed or directed).

If your doctor feels you may be at risk of osteomalacia (bone softening) they may prescribe vitamin D for you.

5. Does vitamin D prevent or treat other illnesses?

Vitamin D is often talked about in association with other conditions such as multiple sclerosis, cancer and heart disease. While many studies have been done on whether vitamin D is helpful for other conditions, it has only been shown to improve bone health.

6. How do I get more information on vitamin D?

Speak to your GP if you have any concerns about the level of vitamin D you get from the sun and your diet. They can advise if you need a vitamin D supplement.

Always get medical advice before taking supplements and remember that they are not a substitute for having a balanced diet.

For more information please visit <http://www.nhsinform.co.uk/>

Or telephone NHS Inform on **0800 22 44 88**.