Essential Facts on Vitamin D

What is Vitamin D?

Vitamin D is produced in our skin when we are exposed to sunlight. It helps our bodies to absorb calcium and phosphorous for healthy bones and teeth. It is also needed to support the immune system.

There are two types of vitamin D:

- D_3 (cholecalciferol):
  - is the type formed by sunlight and found in food sources, and is thought to be the preferred form as it lasts longer in the body

- D_2 (ergocalciferol):
  - is the plant-derived form which is provided by some supplements and found in very small amounts in some mushrooms

Sources of Vitamin D

Sunlight is the main source of vitamin D. However, not all of us get enough vitamin D from sunlight on our skin when we are outside, particularly during the winter months, as in the UK we can only make it between April and September:

Vitamin D is only found in these foods:

- Oily Fish
- Eggs
- Meat
- Fortified Foods

Vitamin D Deficiency

Having too little vitamin D can be detrimental to the absorption of calcium and phosphorous in the body. This can lead to bone deformities such as rickets in children, and bone pain and tenderness as a result of a condition called osteomalacia in adults.

Some people get enough vitamin D through exposure to sunlight, but 30−40% of people in the UK are deficient in winter. Most at risk are those with darker skins, young children, adolescents, people over 65 years and those who are not exposed to much sunlight.

Who Should Take Vitamin D Supplements?

The Department of Health recommends that all children aged six months to five years should take a daily supplement containing vitamin D. Other groups who should take a vitamin D supplement include:

- Babies who receive less than 500 ml of infant formula a day
- Breastfed babies from one month
- All pregnant and breastfeeding women
- Those aged 65 years or over
- People with limited sun exposure

Colief Expert and child nutritionist Judy More’s top tips on getting enough vitamin D:

- Ensure you and your children spend some time outside each day during the summer months before applying sunscreen. Use sunscreen to prevent sunburn.
- Some foods in the UK are fortified with vitamin D, including a few breakfast cereals and breads. Try to incorporate these into your diets and eat oily fish once or twice a week.
- Take a daily supplement of 10 micrograms (400IU) and look out for the preferred form of vitamin D_3 (cholecalciferol).

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References:


*If their mother did not take a vitamin D supplement during pregnancy