

Vitamin D

What is vitamin D?

Vitamin D is a nutrient that helps build strong bones and teeth. Vitamin D helps your body use and absorb calcium, which is also important for good bone health. When the sun's ultraviolet rays reach your skin, the skin cells make vitamin D. However, your body may not make enough vitamin D. You can also get vitamin D from a few foods, and supplements. Low levels of vitamin D are more likely if:

- You have dark skin.
- You are elderly.
- You don't drink milk or eat dairy products.
- You don't get enough exposure to sunshine
- You are very overweight.
- Your body doesn't absorb fat well.
- You have liver or kidney disease.

How much vitamin D do I need?

These are the amounts of vitamin D that the USDA recommends that you get each day:

Age	Vitamin D
Up to 70 years	600 IU*
Over 70 years	800 IU*

* IU = international units

Your vitamin D blood level can be tested when you have a routine physical exam to see if you are getting enough vitamin D. Adults with low levels of vitamin D, may have a higher risk for bone disease (osteoporosis) and broken bones.

If you can get enough vitamin D from sunshine and in your diet, you don't need to take a supplement. You cannot get too much vitamin D from sunshine. And unless you take lots of cod liver oil, you can't get too much from food. However, you can get too much from supplements. The USDA lists the safe upper limit for vitamin D supplements as 4,000 IU for anyone older than 9 years. Talk with your healthcare provider about how much vitamin D you need, and if you should take a vitamin D supplement.

How can I get more vitamin D?

To get more vitamin D:

- **Eat more salmon, mackerel, canned tuna or sardines.** Each serving has 200 to 360 IU of vitamin D. Some kinds of salmon, such as sockeye, have over 750 IU. Liver and egg yolk also are also good sources.
- **Drink more low-fat milk or orange juice fortified with vitamin D.** One cup has about 100 IU of vitamin D. Low-fat chocolate milk, soups, and

puddings made with milk also provide vitamin D. Some brands of cheese, yogurt, juice, and margarine have added vitamin D. Check food labels for nutrient information.

- **Get a little bit of sun outdoors without sunscreen most days in the late spring and summer.** Spending 5 to 30 minutes in the sun between 10 AM and 3 PM at least twice a week without sunscreen can increase vitamin D levels. However, some experts say that you should not be in the sun without sunscreen because of the skin cancer risk. It's also hard to know how much you need, because different people's bodies make different amounts of vitamin D from sunlight. Don't stay in the sun long enough to get sunburned. Talk to your healthcare provider about your risk for skin cancer.
- **Take a multivitamin or vitamin D supplement.** Pick a formula that has 100% of the vitamin D you should take for your age. Your body will absorb vitamin D best if you take it with a meal. You can buy calcium supplements that include vitamin D. Talk with your healthcare provider about how much vitamin D you need.

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