

VITAMIN D

A Patient Guide for Adults

Do I need vitamin D?

Vitamin D is important for everyone. Vitamin D plays an important role in helping the body to absorb calcium through the small intestine. Our bodies need calcium to help make and maintain healthy bones, muscles and teeth. Too little vitamin D may be linked to a variety of common diseases.

How much do I need?

For most adult women and men at least 800 to 1,000 international units (IU) per day are recommended. Getting too much vitamin D is rare. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about how much vitamin D is right for you. More information on different vitamin D supplements is found below.

Do I need a blood test to check my vitamin D level?

Testing your level of vitamin D is NOT needed.

Where can I get vitamin D from?

Vitamin D is made in the skin when it is exposed to sunlight. A small amount is found in some vitamin supplements and foods.

Vitamin D can be made in the body after careful exposure of the arms and legs to sunlight 10-15 minutes per day in the summer months. The amount of sunlight needed to make enough vitamin D varies, depending upon the person's age, skin colour, sun exposure, and other medical problems. In Canada it is hard to get enough vitamin D from sunlight during the fall, winter and spring.

Another source of vitamin D is food. It can be found in some fish, cod-liver oil, and (to a lesser extent) eggs. In Canada, some vitamin D is added to cow, soy, and rice milk. To get enough vitamin D from milk, you would need to drink 10 cups a day. This chart shows some food sources of vitamin D.

Type of Food	Estimated Vitamin D Content (Approximate Content)
Naturally present in food	
Fresh salmon	100-250 IU per 100 g or 3.5 oz (farmed) 600-1000 per 100 g or 3.5 oz (wild)
Mackerel	80-250 IU per 100 g or 3.5 oz (canned)
Cod liver oil	400-1000 IU per 5 ml or 1 teaspoon
Tuna	41-105 IU per 100 g or 3.5 oz (canned) 380-690 IU per 100 g or 3.5 oz (fresh)
Sardines	70-360 IU per 100 g or 3.5 oz (canned)
Egg yolk	20-25 IU vitamin each
Mushrooms	18 IU per 100 g or 3.5 oz (white button) 96 IU per 100 g or 3.5 oz (cooked shiitake)

Vitamin D-fortified foods (Canada)	
Cow's milk	100 IU per 250 ml or 1 cup
Soy or rice milk	80 IU per 250 ml or 1 cup
Some orange juices	100 IU per 250 ml or 1 cup
Margarine	25 IU per 5 ml or 1 teaspoon

Supplements

Other than in summer, vitamin D from the sun or from food is often not enough for our body's needs. Most BC adults would benefit from a vitamin D supplement of at least 800-1,000 IU per day.

Vitamin D supplements come in many different forms. The most common are vitamin D₂ (ergocalciferol) and vitamin D₃ (cholecalciferol). Vitamin D₃ is recommended and is the most common form available over the counter in pharmacies.

Supplements may be taken weekly or monthly if it is more convenient than daily.

For example, a vitamin D₃ dose of 1000 IU per day may also be taken as a single weekly dose of 7,000 IU or as a single monthly dose of 30,000 IU. Your doctor or pharmacist can help you decide how much and how often to take your vitamin D supplements.

More information

- HealthLink BC – health and diet information for British Columbians www.healthlinkbc.ca or telephone 8-1-1
Translation services are available in over 130 languages on request. For deaf and hearing-impaired assistance (TTY) call 7-1-1.