



Vitamin D

Why is vitamin D important?

You need vitamin D to have healthy bones. This vitamin helps calcium get into your bones to make them strong. People with diabetes, some cancers, heart disease, depression, and some pregnancy problems such as preeclampsia and preterm labor may have low levels of vitamin D. Getting enough vitamin D will protect your bones, but it is not yet known if getting enough vitamin D helps other health problems.

Where does vitamin D come from?

You can get vitamin D from 3 sources: ultraviolet (UVB) rays from sunlight or tanning lights, foods with vitamin D, or vitamin D pills.

Your body produces vitamin D when UVB rays from the sun get through your skin. How much vitamin D you make from sunlight depends on how light or dark your skin is. Darker-skinned people need to be in the sun for longer than lighter-skinned people to make enough vitamin D. The amount of your skin that is in sunlight is also important. The more of your skin that is in the sun, the more vitamin D your body will make. The amount of vitamin D you make also depends on where you live, the time of year, and the time of day your skin is in sunlight. For many people living in North America, the UVB rays from the sun are not strong enough for your skin to make vitamin D during the winter.

Not many foods have vitamin D. Cod liver oil, salmon, mackerel, and canned tuna fish are the foods with the largest amounts of vitamin D. Smaller amounts of vitamin D are found in beef liver, sardines, and egg yolk. Milk with vitamin D added is the most common food source for vitamin D. Some orange juices, yogurts, and breakfast cereals also have vitamin D added. The table on the next page shows the amount of vitamin D in common food sources.

Taking a vitamin D pill can help you make sure you are getting enough vitamin D.

How much vitamin D do I need?

Women younger than 70 years of age and women who are pregnant or breastfeeding need to get 600 IU (International Units) of vitamin D daily. Women older than 70 years should get 800 IU of vitamin D daily. If you have a health problem such as osteoporosis, history of breaking bones, malabsorption (including gastric bypass surgery), or kidney or liver disease, or if you take steroid medicines, talk with your health care provider. You may need more or less vitamin D than the amount needed by people without these health problems.

How do I know if I am getting enough vitamin D?

Your vitamin D level can be checked with a blood test, which is called 25(OH)D. If your vitamin D level is low, talk with your health care provider about how to get enough vitamin D. Too much vitamin D can be harmful.

Does my baby need to take vitamin D drops?

All babies who are breastfed or taking both breast milk and formula should be given 400 IU of vitamin D drops daily until the baby drinks 32 ounces of whole milk per day. Infant formula has vitamin D added to it. If your baby is taking formula, vitamin D drops should be given until the baby is drinking about 32 ounces of formula per day.



Food Sources of Vitamin D

Food	IU per serving
Cod liver oil, 1 tablespoon	1360
Salmon (sockeye), cooked, 3 ounces	447
Mackerel, cooked, 3 ounces	388
Tuna fish, canned in water, drained, 3 ounces	154
Milk with vitamin D added, 1 cup (nonfat, reduced fat, or whole milk)	115-124
Orange juice with vitamin D added, 1 cup	100*
Yogurt with 20% of the daily amount recommended for vitamin D added, 6 ounces	80*
Margarine with vitamin D added, 1 tablespoon	60
Beef liver, cooked, 3.5 ounces	49
Sardines, canned in oil, drained, 2 sardines	46
Egg, 1 large (vitamin D is found in yolk)	41
Ready-to-eat cereal with 10% of the daily amount recommended for vitamin D added, 3/4 to 1 cup	40*
Swiss cheese, 1 ounce	6

*Different brands of orange juice, yogurt, and cereal have different amounts of vitamin D added. You can find the amount of vitamin D on the food label.
Source: Office of Dietary Supplements, National Institutes of Health.

For More Information

American Academy of Pediatrics: Vitamin D and Iron Supplements for Babies

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/baby/feeding-nutrition/Pages/Vitamin-Iron-Supplements.aspx>

Endocrine Society Hormone Health Network: Vitamin D

<https://www.hormone.org/hormones-and-health/hormones/vitamin-d>

National Institutes of Health: Vitamin D Fact Sheet

<https://ods.od.nih.gov/factsheets/VitaminD-Consumer/>

Vitamin D Council: How Do I Get the Vitamin D My Body Needs?

https://www.vitamindcouncil.org/about-vitamin-d/how-do-i-get-the-vitamin-d-my-body-needs/#.XD_KrcR7ncs

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