

About Vitamin D and Vitamin D Deficiency

What does vitamin D do?

Vitamin D is a fat-soluble vitamin that is found in food and can also be made in your skin after exposure to the sun. Vitamin D sends signals that tell the body to absorb calcium from the digestive system and put it places like your bones. It is also important for immunity, growth and development, and communication between some types of cells.

What happens if my vitamin D is low/if I don't get enough vitamin D?

If you do not have enough vitamin D you can develop a condition called osteomalacia. Many times, this is a “silent condition” which means that you feel no obvious symptoms. When you have osteomalacia your bones become soft and weak. You may get weak muscles, or bone pain (especially in your hips and back).

If vitamin D deficiency becomes severe or continues over a long period of time, there can be permanent disability due to bone loss. Serious problems may also develop with the nervous system and immune system.

What are other symptoms?

- Muscle tics, twitches or spasms (especially facial)
- Unexplained fracture
- Seizure
- Depression, Seasonal Affective Disorder
- Loss of balance, increased falling
- Arrhythmia, hypertension
- Breast, prostate, colon cancers

Where can I get Vitamin D?

Humans make vitamin D in our skin in response to sun exposure. So one way to get vitamin D is to get adequate sunlight without or with very minimal SPF (sun screen protection above SPF 8 blocks almost 100% of vitamin D production). Fatty fish (such as salmon and sardines), dairy products, fortified soy products, eggs and liver are good dietary sources of vitamin D. If you have a vitamin D deficiency, your doctor may recommend supplemental vitamin D in addition to diet and sunlight. If you are supplementing vitamin D, it is also important to make sure that you have adequate calcium.

Other important things

As a fat-soluble vitamin, vitamin D can have side effects and toxicity if taken at doses that are too high or if taken for too long. For this reason, it is not a good idea to take high dose vitamin D on your own, unless instructed to do so by your doctor. Also, if your doctor has placed you on a high dose of vitamin D, it is very important to take it as directed and to follow instructions for follow-up laboratory evaluations.