



From the desk of the Registered Dietitian: *Rachel Robinson, RD, Chief Clinical Dietitian*

Vitamin D

Vitamin D is a vitamin that is present in very few foods naturally. It is added to some foods, like milk, and is also available as a supplement, but did you know you can also make vitamin D when sunlight hits your skin?

Why do I need vitamin D?

Vitamin D promotes calcium absorption which helps prevent bones becoming weak and brittle. Together with calcium, vitamin D helps protect older adults from osteoporosis. Vitamin D also has other functions in the body, such as supporting immune function and reducing inflammation.

How much vitamin D do I need each day?

According to the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) for vitamin D, men and women age 51-70 should get 600 IU of vitamin D each day. Men and women greater than 70 years of age should get 800 IU of vitamin D. If you are concerned that you may be deficient in Vitamin D, your doctor can check and give you supplementation recommendations if necessary.

Note: IU stands for International Units, which is how vitamin D is often measured

What foods contain Vitamin D?

Very few foods naturally contain vitamin D. The flesh of fatty fish like salmon, tuna, and mackerel as well as fish liver oil are good sources. There is some vitamin D in cheese and egg yolks. Some mushrooms provide vitamin D, especially those exposed to ultraviolet light under controlled conditions. Fortified foods are also a source of vitamin D. This includes milk, ready to eat breakfast cereals, some orange juices, yogurts, and margarines.

Can you really get Vitamin D from the sun?

Yes! The most natural way to get vitamin D is by exposing your bare skin to ultraviolet B sunlight rays. You do not need to get a tan or burn to get Vitamin D- about 15 minutes of direct sunlight without sunblock should be enough. The more skin you expose the more vitamin D is produced. The amount of vitamin D you get from exposing your bare skin to the sun depends on:

- The time of day – your skin produces the most vitamin midday.
- Where you live – the closer to the equator you live, the easier it is for you to produce vitamin D from sunlight all year round.
- The color of your skin – pale skins make vitamin D more quickly than darker skin.

